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Gold Mining Activity in
Yapacana National Park
Venezuela's Amazon Region:
A national, international and geopolitical matter
of extreme urgency for the environment

January 2019

“The ELN's interest in settling into this area is mainly economic. In addition to the contraband and cocaine traffic, there is also the expectation of controlling the illegal mining activity and the revenues derived from drug trafficking.”

- Eduardo Alvarez Vanegas and collaborators¹

“It sure is pretty over there! ”

- A miner interviewed at Puerto Ayacucho, in reference to the order and security that reigns supreme over Yapacana, as instilled by the guerrilla forces from Colombia.

¹ 2018. Trayectorias y dinámicas territoriales de las disidencias de las FARC. Published by FUNDACIÓN IDEAS PARA LA PAZ. April of 2018. Serie Informes N. 30, Bogotá, Colombia

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Acronyms

ABRAE	General Office of Military Counterintelligence
Áreas Bajo Régimen Administrativo Especial Areas Under Special Administrative Control	
ACTO	ELN <i>Ejército de Liberación Nacional</i> National Liberation Army
Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization	
ADI	ESA European Space Agency
Área de Defensa Integral Integral Defense Area	
AMO	FANB <i>Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana</i> Bolivarian National Armed Force
Arco Minero del Orinoco Orinoco Mining Arc	
AVN	FARC <i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</i> Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
Agencia Venezolana de Noticias Venezuelan News Agency	
CBD	FARC-EP <i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo</i> Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army
Convention on Biological Diversity	
CEO	GN <i>Guardia Nacional</i> National Guard
Comando Estratégico Operacional Operational Strategic Command	
COIAM	GNB <i>Guardia Nacional Bolivariana</i> Bolivarian National Guard
Coordinadora de Organizaciones Indígenas de Amazonas	
Leadership of Indigenous Organizations of Amazonas	
CORE	IBA Important Bird and Biodiversity Area
Comando Regional Regional Command	
CUFAN	IFJ International Federation of Journalists
Comando Unificado de la Fuerza Armada Nacional	
National Armed Force Unified Command	
CVG	INAC <i>Instituto Nacional de Aeronáutica Civil</i> National Civil Aeronautics Institute
Corporación Venezolana de Guayana (Government-owned development corporation for the Guayana region)	
DGCIM	INEA <i>Instituto Nacional de Espacios Acuáticos</i> National Aquatic Spaces Institute
Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar	
INPARQUES	
<i>Instituto Nacional de Parques</i> National Parks Institute	

IUCN International Union for Conservation	MPPPEHV <i>Ministerio para el Poder Popular para Ecosocialismo, Hábitat y Vivienda</i> Ministry for the People's Power for Ecosocialism, Habitat and Housing
IVIC <i>Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas</i> Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research	MinAmbiente <i>Ministerio de Ambiente</i> Ministry of the Environment
KUBAWY <i>Kurripaco, Baniba, Warekena y Yeral del Guainía, Río Negro y Atabapo</i> Kurripaco, Baniba, Warekena y Yeral of the Guainía, Río Negro and Atabapo (An indigenous organization)	NGO Non-Governmental Organization
KUYUNU <i>Organización Ye'kuana del Alto Ventuari</i> Ye'kuana of the Upper Ventuari Organization	OAS Organization of American States
MARN <i>Ministerio del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales</i> Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources	OIPUS <i>Organización de Piaroas Unidos del Sipapo</i> Organization of the United Piaroas of the Sipapo
MARNR <i>Ministerio del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales Renovables</i> Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources	OMIDA <i>Organización de Mujeres Indígenas de Autana</i> Indigenous Women's Organization of Autana
MINAMB <i>Ministerio de Ambiente</i> Ministry of the Environment	ORPIA <i>Organización Regional de Pueblos Indígenas de Amazonas</i> Amazonas Indigenous Peoples' Regional Organization
MINEC <i>Ministerio de Ecosocialismo</i> Ministry of Ecosocialism	PDVSA <i>Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.</i> (The government-owned oil company)
MOINADDHH <i>Movimiento Indígena Amazonense de Derechos Humanos</i> Amazonian Indigenous Human Rights Movement	PORU <i>Plan de Ordenamiento, Manejo y Reglamento de Uso</i> Management Plan and Use Regulation
MPPEA <i>Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ambiente</i> Ministry of the People's Power for the Environment	PROVEA <i>Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción</i> Venezuelan Education-Action Program
	RAISG <i>Red Amazónica de Información Socioambiental Georreferenciada</i> Amazonian Georeferenced Socioenvironmental Information Network

REDI <i>Región Estratégica de Defensa Integral</i> Integral Defense Strategic Region	National Integrated Service for the Administration of Customs Duties and Taxes
SADA - Amazonas <i>Servicio Autónomo para el Desarrollo Ambiental del Estado Amazonas</i> Autonomous Service for Environmental Development of the State of Amazonas	USGS United States Geological Service
SAIME <i>Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería</i> Administrative Service for Identification, Migration and Immigration Control	VPI <i>Venezuela por Internet</i> (An independent Internet-based news broadcasting service)
SEBIN <i>Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional</i> Bolivarian National Intelligence Service	YNP Yapacana National Park
SENIAT <i>Servicio Nacional Integrado de Administración Aduanera y Tributaria</i>	ZODI <i>Zona Operativa de Defensa Integral</i> Integral Defense Operational Zone
	ZSF <i>Zona de Seguridad Fronteriza</i> Border Security Zone

Summary

Two thousand hectares of Yapacana National Park's surface is being subjected to gold mining activity, a case of extreme ecocide. The impact on its ecosystems manifests itself not only on the surface area that has been directly destroyed but also as the radial and expansive effects caused by the more than 2,000 miners currently occupying the national park. This makes Yapacana the national park that, without a doubt, has suffered the highest level of destruction. Mining activity was already present on a very small scale starting in the mid 1980's, but its accelerated growth began in the year 2004 and took on an exponential trajectory starting in 2012 and 2014. All mining activity inside Yapacana, as well as in the rest of the state of Amazonas, is illegal. Since its beginnings, this mining activity has been linked to a business operation run from Colombia, and protected by that country's guerrilla forces. From time to time, Venezuelan authorities have taken measures to evict the miners. Nevertheless, gradually and increasingly, Venezuelan authorities have ceased to take effective measures and have surrendered control of the territory and its mining activities to the guerrilla forces, today commanded by the ELN. This surrender has been agreed to under a criminal scheme that benefits Venezuelan military officers and politicians. Without a doubt, Yapacana is the largest and least regulated mining area in the entire Orinoco-Amazon region (including Colombia and Venezuela), something that contributes essential sustenance to Colombia's economy and serves as the main source of financial support for the ELN. This mining activity in Yapacana is closely linked to drug trafficking and to the cocaine that is processed in Colombia. Furthermore, Yapacana has become the hub whose spokes branch out as a gradual and progressive invasion by the guerrilla forces toward the interior of the states of Amazonas and Bolívar, and without a doubt plays a key role in the strategy of survival and evolution of this complex and efficient criminal organization. It is virtually impossible for Venezuela to find a solution to this extremely grave situation that has in fact displaced the Venezuelan State and established a guerrilla quasi-state, yet under the auspices of the current political regime that governs Venezuela. Colombia, Brazil and all the political entities of the international community need to do their part so that the Yapacana case becomes a top of the priority; a solution needs to be found, given that it is turning into a situation that is generating undesirable and radical impacts that go beyond Venezuela's borders. The return of the institutions of the Venezuelan State and the application of its body of law become imperative in order to abate mining activity in the national park. This is an essential requisite for any policy for the sustainable development of Venezuela's South and of the northern part of the Greater Amazon region.

Introduction

Yapacana is synonymous with gold in Venezuela's Amazon Region. It is famous, not just for being a national park that protects a unique treasure trove of biodiversity, but also for being a permanent focus of the rampant and destructive illegal mining activity known to all in the state of Amazonas, by the authorities and general populace alike, as well as by Venezuela's environmentalists. Nevertheless, nothing significant has been accomplished in the way of putting an end to this destruction once and for all. It is certainly not one of the most emblematic national parks in the country, but throughout this report it will become evident that it represents the most visible case of the Venezuelan State's negligence, indolence and lack of political will power to provide protection and proper management.

The report presents the results of a study designed to identify and locate current mining sites inside Yapacana National Park (YNP), and explain the dynamics and causes of the intense mining operations taking place there. Its final objective is to make this situation the focus of attention by Venezuela's citizenry, by international authorities and by the world's court of public opinion, so as to make known the extremely grave situation that exists there, as well as its political and environmental repercussions. We are certain that it will serve as a foundation for enabling an honest government to honor Venezuela's international commitments in the matter of biodiversity, and put a final end to this intolerable situation that we have documented.

In order to make an objective evaluation we based our research on three sources of information: an interpretation of recent high-resolution satellite imagery, a systematic review of the subject by way of the Internet, and recent interviews of highly credible and suitable eyewitnesses who have first-hand knowledge of the reality of YNP. In order to understand the current situation one has to delve into the history of mining activities in the national park over the past 30 years. This is essential for putting into perspective what is happening now. For reasons of security, the identities of the interviewed witnesses is being kept anonymous, as well as that of persons who have supported this study, the reason being the lack of respect for human rights that currently prevails in Venezuela. As will become evident for the readers, mining activities in YNP are part of a process weaved within a complex scheme of organized crime, which has serious repercussions for geopolitics and international security. This can only be explained within the framework of a strategy that has been hatched at the highest levels of Venezuela's current political and military powers.

We are especially grateful to Radiant Earth Foundation, which has generously provided us with access to its working platform and its extensive satellite imagery database. Likewise, we give special thanks to Digital Globe for having provided high-resolution images of specific sites of particular interest.

Chapter 1

Statement and Legal Context

Yapacana National Park (YNP) is located in the state of Amazonas, on the peneplain of the Ventuari and Orinoco rivers, a landscape carved by the confluence of these two rivers. The most salient physiographic feature of this relatively flat landscape is Cerro Yapacana, a sandstone mountain located in the southwest quadrant, with an elevation of 1,345 m (4,415 ft) above sea level, having the contours of a mesa or butte, characteristic of the tepuy formations of southern Venezuela. Also salient on the landscape is another mountain of lesser elevation, known as Cerro Moyo, located to the northwest of Yapacana. While the word tepuy, taken from the language of the Pemón, an indigenous people living in the state of Bolívar, is used over there in reference to such mountains, such is not the case in the state of Amazonas, where the term cerro is used instead. Technically, in this sense, Cerro Yapacana, which is really two contiguous mountains, one larger than the other, as well as Cerro Moyo, could each be referred to as a tepuy. All of YNP and its environs are part of the sociocultural space belonging to the Arawak indigenous peoples, as well as to the Huottüja (Piaroa) and the Mako. A good source of documental information about the park can be found in the report by Castillo and Salas (2007), which we will generally follow in this chapter.



Figure 1. 1 Location of Yapacana National Park in the regional context of the state of Amazonas, Venezuela.

Yapacana was designated as a national park by Decree No. 2980 of 12 December 1978 by the President of the Republic. Textually, this decree is based on the

following argumentation: "Considering, that the area located at the confluence of the Orinoco and Ventuari rivers, and the Caño Yagua, within the jurisdiction of the Atabapo Department of the Federal Territory of Amazonas, represents a resource that is not only scenic, but also scientific, and encompasses important phytogeographical discoveries; Considering, that the area referred to includes savannahs having invasive vegetation, a testimony to the evolutionary nature of the vegetation, with floristic connections pertaining to the paleotropical and neotropical realms..." (República de Venezuela, 1979).

Its administration and management is the responsibility of the National Institute of Parks - *Instituto Nacional de Parques* (INPARQUES), an organization formally in charge of managing the entire system of Venezuela's national parks by legal mandate (Republic of Venezuela 1978). However, given that as of yet there has been no approval or implementation of its respective Management Plan and Use Regulation - *Plan de Ordenamiento, Manejo y Reglamento de Uso* [PORU], authorization for any activities must be granted by the General Sectorial Office of Environmental Planning and Management² (Republic of Venezuela 1989a), after prior issuance of an opinion by the National Commission for the Protection of the Tepuys and the National Parks Institute (Republic of Venezuela 1991). Today, after the above-mentioned Commission has issued a prior opinion, the Eco-Socialism Ministry must then issue such authorizations.³ It is necessary to clarify that the functions of a "ministry of the environment," which legally speaking belongs to the National Environmental Authority⁴, has been given different names historically: MARNR (1978), MARN, Minamb, MinAmbiente, MPPEHV (Ministry of the People's Power for Eco-Socialism, Habitat and Housing, year 2014), MPPEA, and now MINEC. Whatever nomenclature we use will be in reference to the National Environmental Authority of the National Executive.

Officially, the National Park has a surface area of 320,000 hectares (MARNR 1992) located within the boundaries described by geographical references that are specified in the decree used for its creation. In order to determine the boundaries of YNP in our report we utilized digital cartographic information and satellite imagery. It is noteworthy that the decree that created INPARQUES also assigned to it responsibility for determining and marking the land boundaries, but up until now this has not been done. It is also important to point out that the decree is imprecise in some of its sections, something that needs to be rectified opportunely. Meanwhile, by and large, it is now possible to mark the boundaries with much more accuracy using high-resolution georeferenced satellite imagery that has become available.

² Today known as the Ministry of the People's Power for Eco-Socialism (MINEC).

³ Throughout the entire report we make references to the Executive's national environmental authority, which today is known as MINEC, having the generic name of Ministry of the Environment. This authority has undergone numerous name changes during the last 30 years.

⁴ Generic nomenclature adopted by the Organic Law on the Environment of 2006.

All of Venezuela's national parks are governed by the Law Ratifying the Washington Convention (United States of Venezuela 1941), in whose Article 3 it is established that "The riches present therein are not to be exploited for commercial purposes." Subsequently, the Law on Forest Lands and Waters of the year 1966 (Republic of Venezuela 1966) states in its Article 12, "National Parks may only be utilized for the public's relaxation and education, for tourism and scientific research, under conditions to be determined by the respective Decrees or Resolutions of the Ministry. The natural wealth present in the National Parks may not be subjected to interventions that may be detrimental to the Parks' functions, or exploited for commercial purposes."

An appropriate synthesis of the meaning of national parks in Venezuela is stated as follows by Gondelles (1982): "Relatively extensive natural areas that contain exceptional representative examples of nature and unique scenery that have not been entirely modified by human actions. They are declared to be such in the first place for reasons of protecting those values, and secondly for purposes of recreation, education, research and tourism. The extraction of their natural resources for commercial purposes, such as wildlife, forests and minerals, and the intrusion of incompatible urban, mining, military and farming activities are not allowed. As for farming, exceptions may be made as in the case of resident indigenous communities and, temporarily, in the case of residents that have legitimate property rights."

Venezuela's national parks and natural monuments are "Protected Areas" in the legal sense established in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which defines a Protected Area as: "a geographically defined area which is designated and managed to achieve certain conservation objectives."⁵ Elsewhere, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) considers it to be "a clearly defined geographical area, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystems and cultural values." Both definitions are technically equivalent.⁶

Because Yapacana is a National Park, there are restrictions on uses and activities, as there are prohibitions against sport or commercial hunting, bringing in or breeding domestic animals, mass sports and recreation events, bearing arms, removing plant life and wildlife species, among other things. Permitted activities include hiking and scientific research. Even though the park has yet to be assigned its respective PORU, the above mentioned regulations are detailed in the Partial Regulations of the Organic Law for Land Use Planning Relating to Administration and Management of National Parks and Natural Monuments, better known as Decree No. 276 (Republic

⁵ <https://www.iucn.org/es/regiones/america-del-sur/nuestro-trabajo/areas-protegidas/%C2%BFque-es-un-area-protegida>

⁶ <http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/content/protected-area>

of Venezuela 1989a). This Decree also establishes in its Article 12 that "Inside national parks there is prohibition against: (1) agricultural crops... (2) mining activities and the extraction of hydrocarbons..."

It has been clearly determined that Venezuela's national parks are classified under "Category II National Park", which is an international standard set by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)⁷ (Dudley 2008). According to the IUCN, Category II protected areas are "large natural or near-natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation of environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities." This categorization by the IUCN was initially devised "as a form of classification and registration of protected areas." Nevertheless, "Other uses have been added gradually, assuming, for example, an important role in planning systems for protected areas and in the development of coherent conservation policies." In this sense, the members of the IUCN themselves supported this focus through a recommendation to governments with the intention of having them prohibit mining activities in protected areas under Categories I through IV, which obviously includes Category II (Dudley 2008). This recommendation (No. 2.82) was adopted by the IUCN World Conservation Congress, held at Amman, Jordan in October of 2000. Among other things, it called on all IUCN's State members "to prohibit by law, all exploration and extraction of mineral resources in protected areas corresponding to IUCN Protected Area Management Categories I to IV." (Dudley 2008).⁸ In the case of Venezuela, this has already been established by law.

In addition, mining activity in the state of Amazonas is absolutely prohibited throughout its entire territory, according to Decree No. 269 from the Presidency of the Republic (Republic of Venezuela 1989a). This decree ordered, furthermore, the immediate suspension of all current mining activity. Its original jurisdiction was the Federal Territory of Amazonas, which later became the state of Amazonas (in the year 1992), a fact that does not modify its enforceability. This decree has not been abrogated and continues to remain in full force.

In conclusion, mining of any kind is absolutely prohibited inside any of Venezuela's national parks⁹, especially in the state of Amazonas. In this respect, there may not be, and must not be, any mining, even along its boundaries, or in contiguous or

⁷ English uses the acronym IUCN, while the acronym in Spanish and French is UICN.

⁸ On that date, Venezuela, represented by its Ministry of the Environment, was a member of the IUCN. Nevertheless, the resolutions or recommendations of the IUCN are not binding, but they do carry a lot of political weight because of the technical expertise they offer. Usually its recommendations are heeded by member countries. IUCN is a mixed organization where States may be members, but so may non-governmental organizations.

⁹ And in all other Protected Areas in general.

neighboring areas. Likewise, we wish to make it clear that throughout this report, unless it is found in a quotation, we will not make any references to "illegal mining" as such, given that this would constitute a redundancy: all mining in Amazonas is illegal and, therefore, we will be succinct and just call it "mining".

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Chapter 2

Socio-Environmental Assets of Yapacana National Park

2.1. Geographical location

Yapacana National Park (YNP) is located within the jurisdiction of Atabapo municipality of the state of Amazonas. It spans over part of the upper Orinoco River basin, eastward from the confluence of the Orinoco and Ventuari rivers and southward toward the Peneplain of the Casiquiare Branch. The Ventuari River defines its northern boundary, while the Caño Yagua marks its eastern and southern boundaries, while the Orinoco River defines its western boundary.

Most of the National Park consists of lowlands, with very little slope or gradient, known as peneplains because of their transitional contours, where low hills blend into plains (Huber 1995a). The topography varies between 100 m (330 ft) and 1,345 m (4,400 ft) above sea level, approximately, a salient feature being Cerro Yapacana, located in the southwestern part of the Park some 40 km (25 miles) from the confluence of the Orinoco and Ventuari rivers.

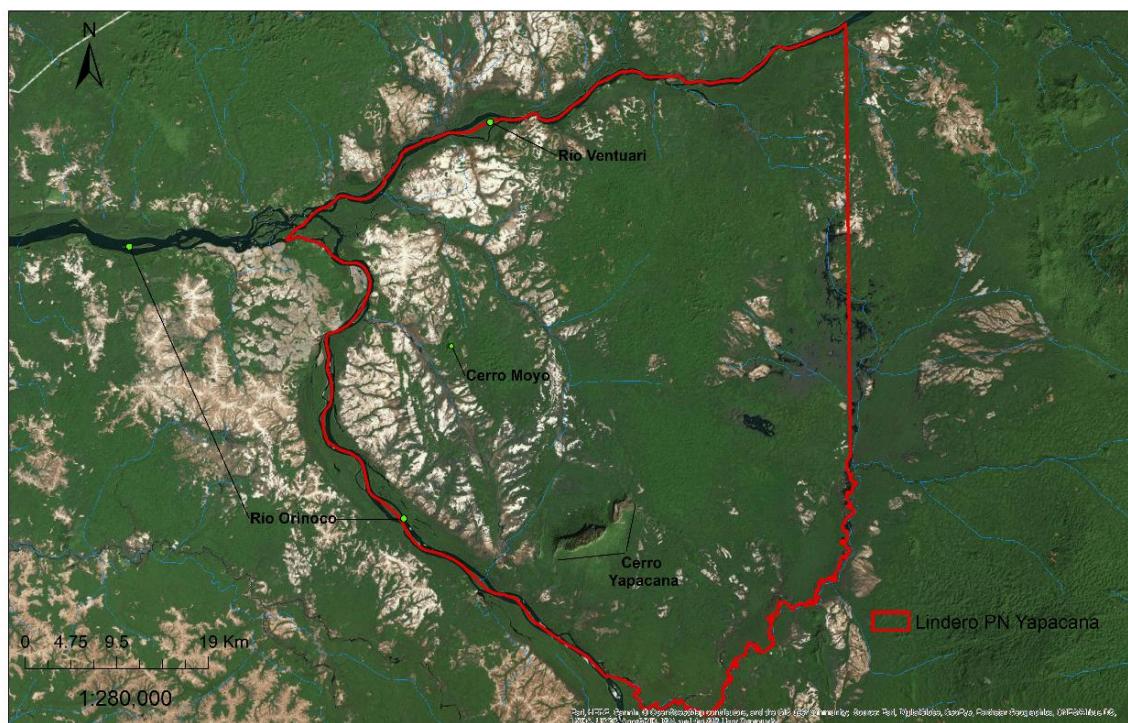


Figure 2. 1 Boundaries of Yapacana National Park.

2.2. Physical and Natural Aspects

2.2.1. Climate

According to Köopen's classification system, YNP's climate is Rainy Tropical, or Megathermal Humid, based on Thornthwaite's classifications. Humidity levels are typical of rainforest areas, with an average annual precipitation of 2,360 mm (93 inches), annual maximums exceeding 3,000 mm (118 inches) (MARNR 1992) and a short dry season from December to February, with annual precipitation averages of less than 75 mm (3 inches). Average precipitation increases along a gradient that runs from north to south and is concentrated mainly between May and August, a period during which almost 60% of the average annual precipitation occurs. Heat levels are of the macrothermal type, with an average annual temperature of 24°C (75°F) (Boadas 1983, MARNR-ORSTOM 1988, Steyermark et al. 1995). It is noteworthy that, during the dry season, in the peneplain areas, temperatures will rise, and there is an increase in rainfall, evapotranspiration and cloudiness. Likewise, on the slopes and summits of Cerro Yapacana average, annual temperature will vary between 18°C (64°F) and 24°C (75°F) (Huber 1995a).

2.2.2. Soils

According to Aymard et al. (2006), the soils of the Casiquiare Peneplain are of the oligotrophic type and have drainage problems. In general, the pH is extremely acidic along the topsoil horizon, with a slight increase at deeper levels. The drainage for these soils varies from fast, to moderate, to very slow, and shows significant levels of aluminum toxicity. In line with the above study, research by MARNR-ORSTOM (1988) and CVG-TECMIN (1994) on the distribution and characteristics of the soils in this region found soil types such as: sandy or slaty Entisols and very superficial Histosols over sandstone, Ultisols with medium to fine textures, sometimes slaty, over granite and gneiss, and poorly drained Ultisols over alluvia.

Aymard et al. (2006) further concluded that there is a close correlation between humidity levels and soil distribution in the northern part of YNP and its environs, defined as being an alluvial plain characterized by low fertility soils of the Oxisol and Ultisol type, having very fine structures. The resulting samples showed that most of these soils are relatively acidic, very poor, extremely modified and leached, and have scarce capacity for cationic exchange, which suggests that their fertility is considerably low, thus converting them into soils that are not adequate for farming. Likewise, the authors caution about the fragility of these soils, given that they have been submitted to intense weathering and leaching, resulting from high levels of rainfall and high temperatures.

2.2.3. Hydrography

Yapacana National Park is located in the upper Orinoco River basin. The southwest boundary of the Park is demarcated by the Orinoco River, which is Venezuela's

principal waterway, its headwaters located in the Sierra Parima range, on the slopes of Cerro Delgado Chalbaud, elevation 1,047 m (3,435 ft) above sea level.

In this region, there is a high degree of turbidity in the waters of the Orinoco River. These are whitish-grey in color, due to an elevated content of suspended solids (19 mg/L), mainly fine sands and clay, which give these waters characteristically low transparency (60 cm). The river is rich in nutrients and has a neutral pH (Huber 1995a, Mora et al. 2006). Its hydrological levels vary considerably, due to the dry season that lasts from January to April, when the river's volume and flow are at their minimum, and to the rainy season, when maximum levels can be observed during the months of June, July and August (Mattié et al. 2006).

As part of the upper Orinoco basin, the Ventuari River is the Orinoco's main tributary in this region. It approaches the right bank of the Orinoco as they flow together, and it serves to mark the park's northern boundary. The Ventuari is a "clear water" river containing low amounts of suspended solids (11 mg/L), making it highly transparent (100 cm), and it has a low content of nutrients and moderate acidity (Huber 1995a, Mora et al. 2006). The Ventuari's waters flow into the Orinoco near the town of Santa Bárbara, and its outflow is in the form of a delta, thus giving it the name "Internal Delta of the Orinoco-Ventuari" (Mattié et al. 2006). It is noteworthy that across its floodplains there are thriving groves of tropical evergreens, savannahs, brushwood, and vegetation of anthropogenic origin (Aymard et al. 2006).

Another important waterway in YNP is the Caño Yagua. This is a 100 km (63 mile) long "black water" river that drains a 3,320 km² (1,282 square mile) area east and south of Cerro Yapacana and demarcates the eastern part of the Park. It also feeds a small lagoon, commonly known as Laguna Yapacana, located some 30 km (19 miles) to the east of Cerro Yapacana, and it is one of the few lagoons in the lowlands of Venezuela's Amazonian Region (Huber, 1995a).

2.2.4. Geology and geomorphology

The region where YNP is located is part of the Guiana Shield, dating from the Precambrian eon, and is characterized by its underlying complex igneous-metamorphous bedrock, whose rock mass is considered to be among the oldest in Venezuela's geochronology. This mass was formed during different phases of a series of tectonic events that occurred repeatedly during the Achaean and Proterozoic eons (Mendoza 1977, MARNR-ORSTOM, 1988, Huber 1995a, Schubert and Huber 1990). Among the more common rock mass outcroppings, there are a wide variety of granites, gneiss and rhyolites from the Archeozoic and Proterozoic eons, Proterozoic quartzite, and diabase dikes and sills from the Jurassic. These are in addition to residual soils and colluviums from the Holocene epoch and alluvial deposits from the Quaternary period found on the banks of the principal rivers

(MARNR-ORSTOM 1988; Weibezahn 1990). In the park there are other materials consisting of tectonized granitic rocks (granitic gneiss along the lower Ventuari River), the batholithic granite at Parguaza, and the sedimentary rocks of the Roraima Formation (sandstone and conglomerates), with young granitic intrusions such as Cerro Yapacana (Boadas 1983, MARNR-ORSTOM 1988, Weibezahn 1990, Albrizzio, 1995).

The park's wide-ranging geomorphology is reflected in its heterogeneous scenery, owing to, among other factors, the diversity of its contours, mostly flat and low, and from its soils and from the vegetation of its savannahs and forests. Generally speaking, one can distinguish the following landscape categories: a) alluvial plains; b) peneplains resulting from erosion-modification; c) plains resulting from erosion-accumulation; and d) plains resulting from exorheic erosion (MARNR-ORSTOM 1988).

2.2.5. Vegetation

According to Huber (1995b), there is a predominance of forests that are subject to seasonal flooding, consisting of tall tropical evergreens measuring 30 to 40 m (100 to 130 ft) with dense canopies and rounded crowns. Also, on Cerro Yapacana, technically considered to be a *tepuy* with wooded summits (Fundación Terramar 1993, Huber 1995a), one finds two kinds of montane forests; a) tall to medium, dense, tropical evergreen submontane forests, found on the slopes at elevations of approximately 200 to 800 m (670 to 2,600 ft) above sea level; and b) dense, tropical evergreen montane forests (at cloud-level), with short trees measuring up to 15 m (50 ft), occupying the summit of Cerro Yapacana at elevations between 1,000 and 1,300 m (3,300 and 4,300 ft) approximately. It is noteworthy that this author makes reference to the fact that in the aforementioned forest there are endemic species that, according to Llamozas et al. (2003), are severely threatened due to the destruction of their habitat resulting from illegal mining activities that have been taking place there up until this date.

Research conducted by Huber (1995b) notes the peculiarity of the vegetation present at the foot of Cerro Yapacana, due to the conditions of its sandy soils derived from quartz, which have a high degrees of acidity and are extremely poor in nutrients and poorly drained despite their sandy texture. The author states that one finds on this soil layer a broad-leaved grass that grows in bushy clusters, and is subjected to flooding. These grasslands are known as "white sand savannahs." It is entirely possible that these ecosystems have the widest variety of endemic species per hectare (sp/ha) in all the lowlands of the Guayana Region. Furthermore, he states that even though there are similar plant communities in other parts of the Guiana Shield (Guyana, Brazil and Colombia), southern Venezuela is the only place where they have reached such a high degree of differentiation.

Research by Medina (1983) and Medina et al. (1990) indicates that in the Park there is a very peculiar kind of wooded area having an open canopy, characterized by long to medium height stems and small leaves, belonging to the ecoregion known as the "Caatanga de Río Negro." The authors state that these wooded areas are associated with sandy soils that are extremely low in nutrients in areas whose surface is often flooded. Another important characteristic of this ecosystem is that it is present in areas with a relatively high degree of precipitation and little seasonal change; and where just a few days without precipitation will cause hydrological stress in the vegetation, due to the known scarce capacity of these sandy soils for retaining moisture. In reference to these woodlands, Huber (1995b) states that they have one to two arboreal strata at heights of 25 to 30 m (80 to 100 ft), with small thin stems and broad canopies. These look like deciduous forests when viewed from the air. Although they are comparatively poor in species, the author points out that these woodlands have a relatively high number of endemic species, considering this is in the lowlands, and contain very interesting families from a botanical point of view.

2.2.6. Biodiversity

Yapacana National Park is representative of an area showing a high density and great variety of endemic species, as well as endemic species of restricted distribution. Recently, Rodríguez et al. (2006) and Aymard et al. (2006) conducted an inventory of the flora at the confluence of the Orinoco and Ventuari rivers. This inventory revealed the presence of 357 species of vascular plants in vegetation areas that are subjected to flooding. From the totality of these species, 16 are endemic to the state of Amazonas, one of them being reported for the first time for Venezuela, namely the aquatic species *Mourera alcicornis* (*Podostemaceae*). The inventory also reported 285 species in the wooded areas on the dry land in the middle and lower Ventuari River basin. Of the latter group, two species are new to science (*Coccoloba* sp. and *Rudgea* sp.), and seven new entries were obtained regarding Venezuela's flora. It is noteworthy that the diverse endemic species reported by the authors (Table 1) were gathered from diverse streams in the Park, in vegetation areas subjected to flooding.

Table 2. 1 Known endemic species in Yapacana National Park.

SPECIES	ENVIRONMENT
<i>Aspidosperma pachypterum</i>	Shrubland
<i>Capsiandra guayanensis</i>	Riperian woodland
<i>Capsiandra macrocarpa</i> var. <i>macrocarpa</i>	Riparian woodland
<i>Doliocarpus carnevaliorum</i>	Shrubland
<i>Ilex spruceana</i>	Shrubland
<i>Marlierea suborbicularis</i>	Shrubland
<i>Ouratea evoluta</i>	Riparian woodland
<i>Sauvagesia linearifolia</i> subsp. <i>linearifolia</i>	Shrubland
<i>Stachyarrena reticulata</i>	Riparian woodland
<i>Turnera argentea</i>	Shrubland

Source: Rodríguez et al. (2006)

The park is also considered to be an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA). BirdLife International (2007) calls attention to the presence of important bird species, such as the blackpoll warbler (*Dendroica striata*), the northern waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*), the black curassow (*Crax alector*), the red-billed tawny-tufted toucanet (*Selenidera nattereri*), the yellow-billed jacamar (*Galbulula albirostris*), the Yapacana antbird (*Myrmeciza disjuncta*) and the migratory yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*).

A study by Lentino (2006) on the avifauna of the area surrounding the confluence of the Orinoco and Ventuari rivers, which includes a great part of YNP, identifies 47 bird species in addition to those already recorded for that zone, bringing the total to 262. Among the birds identified by the study are the Yapacana antbird (*Myrmeciza disjuncta*), the brown-throated parakeet (*Aratinga pertinax chrysogenys*) and the dusky-billed parrotlet (*Forpus sclateri sclateri*), the last two being new entries for subspecies in Venezuela.

In that same area, Señaris and Rivas (2006) recorded 51 species of reptiles and 29 of amphibians, singling out the Little Red Frog of Yapacana (*Minyobates steyermarki*), an endemic species found only around Cerro Yapacana, as well as the presence (as reported by local inhabitants) of the Orinoco Crocodile (*Crocodylus intermedius*), considered to be an endangered species.

Finally, Castillo and Salas (2007) present a summary (Table 2.2) of the endangered species of flora and fauna in YNP and their risk of extinction nationally and internationally, according to information obtained from IUCN (2006), Rodríguez and Rojas-Suárez (1999) and Llamozas et al. (2003).

Table 2. 2 Endangered species of flora and fauna found in Yapacana National Park.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Risk of Extinction in Venezuela	Risk of Extinction at International Level
Plants			
-	<i>Pentamerista neotropica</i>	Vulnerable	-
-	<i>Tepuianthus yapacanensis</i>	Critically Endangered	-
Amphibians			
Little Red Frog of Yapacana	<i>Dendrobates steyermarki</i>	Lower Risk	Critically Endangered
Reptiles			
Orinoco Caiman	<i>Crocodylus intermedius</i>	Endangered	Vulnerable
Red-headed Amazon River Turtle	<i>Podocnemis erythrocephala</i>	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Big-headed Amazon River Turtle	<i>Peltocephalus dumerilianus</i>	Lower Risk	-
Mammals			
White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	Lower Risk	Lower Risk
White-lipped Peccary	<i>Tayassu pecari</i>	Lower Risk	Lower Risk
Capybara	<i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>	Lower Risk	Lower Risk
South American Tapir	<i>Tapirus terrestris</i>	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Lowland Paca	<i>Agouti paca</i>	Lower Risk	Lower Risk

Source: Castillo and Salas (2007), based on IUCN (2006), Rodríguez and Rojas-Suárez (1999) and Llamozas et al. (2003).

2.3. Inhabitants

Reports published by García (1987) and Romero (2004) state that in the year 1976 there were no indigenous communities in YNP. The authors agree, however, that permanent human settlements around Cerro Yapacana began with the arrival of mining activities in the 1980's. Nevertheless, the area encompassing YNP has been reported to be part of the traditional area of indigenous groups such as the Piaroa (MARN 2001), as well as the Maco, Puinave, Baniva and Curripaco (Bevilacqua et al. 2006, León-Mata et al. 2006).

A study by León-Mata et al. (2006) presented a preliminary evaluation of the utilization of natural resources by the indigenous communities distributed around

the confluence of the Orinoco and Ventuari rivers, encompassing a good part of YNP, as well as the *criollo*¹⁰ communities that have settled in the area. The results demonstrated that the productive systems for subsistence in the communities are dependent almost exclusively on the region's available natural resources, such as fishing, hunting, traditional agriculture, as well as the gathering of produce from the woodlands. Furthermore, they state that the subsistence economy is diverse and closely linked to the aquatic environments, where the traditional indigenous mode of subsistence converges with other ways of life brought in by communities founded by outsiders.

The results presented by León-Mata et al. (2006), obtained by means of surveys answered by the communities, report that the most serious environmental and social problem inside YPN and its environs is the mining activity. The authors emphasize that the mining operations encourage the overexploitation of the wildlife through hunting, and furthermore causes damage to the environment and to the health of humans, as well as serious social problems that include violence, drug addiction, prostitution and the loss of the traditional and ancestral knowledge of the indigenous peoples.

2.4. Yapacana National Park's Priceless Assets

National parks are indispensable geographic spaces for the planet's vital processes, given that they fulfill important functions and play a fundamental role in sustaining life on this Earth at all hierarchical levels. National parks make possible different economic activities by providing raw materials, food and water, among other resources, as well as opportunities for recreation and spiritual fulfillment for all humanity. And what is even more important, their ecosystems are essential for making possible necessary global material cycles such as the carbon and water cycles (IUCN 1993).

Among the more important regulating functions of the national parks one finds: regulation of the chemical composition of the atmosphere and the oceans, climate regulation, protection of river basins and other watersheds, water storage, maintenance of air and water quality, protection against erosion and minimization of sedimentation, capture, conversion and retention of solar energy resulting in the production of biomass, recycling and storage of organic material and nutrients, maintenance of food chains and recycling of nutrients. Meanwhile, they contribute to biological control and serve as habitat for migratory species providing them with breeding grounds, and maintain biological diversity, among other things (IUCN 1993).

¹⁰ A *criollo* is a Spanish-speaking Venezuelan of Hispanic cultural heritage.

In the specific case of YNP it is important to emphasize that the unique scenic, scientific and social characteristics are the result of spontaneous action by processes of a diverse climatic, geological, ecological and biological nature that determined the vegetation and the presence of an extraordinarily wealth of flowers, especially in the savannahs and foothills beneath the summit of Cerro Yapacana. Likewise, it is noteworthy that YNP fulfills important regulating functions that help to minimize certain phenomena and processes that impact the biosphere, such as the depletion of the ozone layer, global heating, acid rain, desertification, and the extinction of plant and animal species, among other things.

The cloud-shrouded forests atop Cerro Yapacana are like a unique biodiversity island amidst a "sea" of savannahs and woodlands of the lowlands below. In and of itself, this makes it an element of great biogeographical importance, unique in Venezuela's Amazonian Region.

In summary, Yapacana National Park protects natural assets that are unique to Venezuela and to the context of Venezuela's Amazonas-Guayana Region.

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Chapter 3

Mining Activity in Yapacana National Park: Historical Background

3.1. Before 2000

A report prepared in 1993 by the Amazonas Office of the National Institute states that the first accounts on mining activities date back to March of 1987. At that time it was observed that there were two active gold mines. Located at the foot of Cerro Yapacana was Mina Nueva and about 200 meters higher up was La Cocina. The Caño Cotúa was used to gain access to both of these.¹¹

The INPARQUES inspection report prepared between 13 and 17 March of 1987 stated for the record that the inspection was being conducted in response to concerns expressed at the *International Meeting: National Parks Looking Forward into the Third Millennium*, held in Caracas.¹² The report states that the mining camp located to the south of Cerro Yapacana was inhabited by 104 people, mostly indigenous, from the Piaroa, Guajibo and Curripaco ethnic groups, but there were also *criollos* and foreigners. It confirmed that a micro-basin had been devastated. A flight reported a clandestine airport, presumably used by light aircraft that bring gold buyers to the area. From 21 to 27 September 1987, INPARQUES made another inspection that led, in two instances, to the detection and verification of the following mining sites, active as well as abandoned, in areas close to Cerro Yapacana: Mina Nueva (south of the mountain), Caño Rita, Caño San Andrés, Wendehake¹³ (west of the mountain), Platanillal (to the north) and La Cocina (to

¹¹ Inparques 1993. *Parque Nacional Yapacana. Situación Actual, Amenazas y Perspectivas*. Informe. Ing. Rafael E. García. Mimeográfico. P.12. Abril.

¹² BIOPARQUES 2007. *Estado de Conservación del Parque Nacional Yapacana. Reporte Especial*. Programa ParksWatch. Sept.

<[https://www.oas.org/dsd/AAPAD2/Docs/\(iii\)%20Yapacana%20NP%20Special%20Report%20\(Venezuela\).pdf](https://www.oas.org/dsd/AAPAD2/Docs/(iii)%20Yapacana%20NP%20Special%20Report%20(Venezuela).pdf)> Consulta del 25.11.18.

¹³ The name, existence and earliest impacts on the scenery around this old mine are attributable to an individual present in Amazonas during the past century, according to what emerges from research using as reference the text titled *De mi inédita Historia General del estado Amazonas* by Oldman Botello. It has to do with Carlos Guillermo Wendehake (Ciudad Bolívar 1888 - Atabapo 1943, of Dutch descent), who, between the 1920's and 1940's lived in the Amazonian region and settled in at the village of San Antonio, in what is today Atabapo Municipality, where he established a plantation near Cerro Yapacana, from which he would extract gold. When going through San Antonio in 1958 on an official mission, Dr. Pablo J. Anduze wrote in his memoirs : "At the site nothing remains of its former prosperity, not even the posts that once held up the roofs of the houses belonging to the former owners [...] I began to remember stories about the founder Carlos Wendehake [...] whose name is closely identified with the Territory. Aside from extracting forest products, he tried to establish a coffee plantation, which by the way flourished, and also added to his fame as being the only one to have discovered and operated a gold mine at Yapacana." (Anduze, *Bajo el signo de Mawari*: 323) <<http://www.cronistadefeatures.com.ve/2017/01/historia-de-amazonas-familias.html>>

Researched on 08 DEC 18.

the northeast). The report explains that each mining camp measured between 0.5 and 2.0 hectares, all located in the vicinity of the mountain.¹⁴

INPARQUES reports that by 1988 there were 9 mines, mostly surrounding the main mountain. "The largest mine in this sector is Platanillal, at the base of Cerro Yapacana, in the direction of La Cocina, in the Northeast Sector, where the excavations are deeper than a man's height (they have to swim under in order to retrieve the material that is to be washed)."¹⁵ This information about mining activities was corroborated and put in writing by the three regulatory entities overseeing mining and environmental matters at the time (INPARQUES, the Ministry of the Environment and Mining, and the Ministry of Energy and Mines)¹⁶.

In February of 1988, the Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (MARNR) presented a report on mining activity throughout the entire entity, entitled "Report on problems relating to mining activity in the Federal Territory of Amazonas," which attributed to *criollo* (Venezuelan) and foreign (Colombian and Brazilian) miners the mining activity that used tools and mechanical devices such as motorized water pumps, cranes, and electric generators, and included the use of mercury for isolating the gold. The commercialization of the extracted gold is done by means of barter, or cash transactions: Bartering took place at San Fernando de Atabapo, where gold was exchanged for mechanical equipment, while the sale of gold in exchange for cash was done at Puerto Ayacucho, San Fernando de Atabapo and other places, the price hovering between Bs 100 and 250 (US\$ 7 and 17) per gram.¹⁷

In June of 1989, the MARNR prepared another document, "Gold Mining in the Federal Territory of Amazonas and its Consequences" (a paper read by M. Baloa), which determined that approximately 1,500 people were involved in this activity in Amazonas, 50% of them indigenous people (Guajibo, Piarroa, Curripaco), 25% Venezuelan *criollos* and 25% foreigners (Colombian, Dominican and others). The report found that beginning in 1983 there was evidence of aggressive mining activity, still at an incipient and controllable stage, in what was then a federal territory. In addition to rudimentary methods, there was also the use of more modern technology. Dynamite was being used, most likely for breaking up rocks. Guns were used to hunt for food and to provide personal protection. Topsoil was being removed and large amounts of dirt were being displaced, along with rocks of different sizes, causing the riverbeds to change their course. Mercury was being

¹⁴ GARCÍA, R. 1988. Informe de la expedición realizada al Territorio Federal Amazonas (Yureba y Cerro Yapacana), para investigar la problemática relativa a la explotación de oro. Pt. Ayacucho. Mimeographed. 7 p.

¹⁵ Inparques 1993. Op. cit.

¹⁶ Inparques – MARNR - MEM 1988. Informe sobre las minas ilegales en Yapacana. Mimeographed. P. 7. September.

¹⁷ BIOPARQUES 2007. Op. cit. Bolivars , according to currency exchange rates at the time.

utilized, as well as large amounts of water. Most of the extracted mineral was being shipped to Colombia, in what constitutes outbound smuggling or illegal exportation.¹⁸

Another report from INPARQUES (1993) identifies two new mines that appeared after 1992 inside the National Park, these being Piedra Blanca and Cerro Moyo. Both were accessible from the communities of Piedra Blanca and Maraya, located in the northwest sector. It describes the mining activity at Yapacana as being rudimentary, where the method used consisted of cutting down trees, moving rocks, and extracting the ore from the predominantly sandy subsoil. All of this was having a heavy impact on the woodlands, where clearings and gaps began to appear. This activity was also eliminating shrubs and grasses of high biological value, most of which were endemic species. The report explains that gold was being extracted initially in an individual manner (individuals or small groups). During the year, the number of miners fluctuated, their presence increasing during the dry season or when there was less rainfall. This illegal activity appeared to be poorly organized, with excavation depths rarely exceeding one meter, using tools such as machetes, axes, picks, sticks, *chícoras* (a uniquely Venezuelan farm tool used for digging narrow deep holes for planting seeds or seedlings or making small excavations in hard clay, consisting of a foot-long chisel-shaped blade with a sharp slightly angled edge at the bottom, tapering into a hollow cylinder toward the top, to which is attached a five-foot wooden shaft gripped by the user), buckets and rudimentary instruments such as pans and troughs used to pan for gold and diamonds out of stream beds and alluvial sand deposits. But by 1993 reports by the National Guard present evidence of a trend away from this rudimentary approach, as evidenced by the increased confiscation of "señoritas" (mechanized pulleys), blasting caps or detonators, scales for weighing the gold, mercury, shotguns, and large food supplies, as well motorized water pumps and other heavy equipment, which indicated an increase in the intensity of the mining activity.¹⁹

According to this source (INPARQUES 1993), the gold was being sold directly to regional merchants at a community called Cárida, in San Fernando de Atabapo Municipalitu, at Puerto Inírida (now called Inírida, Colombia), and at Puerto Ayacucho (see Figure 1.1). Generally, the gold was bartered for goods that included shotguns, power saws, outboard motors, and general supplies. Some of the transactions were also in cash.

This report also mentions that "...during the past four years there has been a considerable increase in *criollos* coming into the region from different parts of the country (Puerto Ayacucho, Caracas and other cities, mainly from the states of Bolívar, Falcón, Sucre and Miranda), in addition to Colombians and Brazilians, all of

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ Inparques 1993. Op. cit.

which brings major and irreversible impacts resulting from mining activities using mechanized tools that include electric generators, motorized water pumps, and of course mercury. Added to all this activity are the resulting pollution and its impact.”²⁰ Furthermore, reference is made to the presence of indigenous people involved in mining, stating that they were coming mainly from San Fernando de Atabapo²¹ and to a lesser degree from the following communities: La Venturosa, Santa Bárbara, Macuruco, Guachapana, San Antonio, San Juan de Puruname, Piedra Blanca, Maraya, Canaripó and Picúa.

In 1995 the Autonomous Service for the Environmental Development of the State of Amazonas (SADA-Amazonas), the autonomous services that replaced the former Amazonas Bureau of the MARNR, issues the "Report on the Current Illegal Mining Situation in Yapacana National Park," confirming the existence of the following mines: 1) On the slopes of Cerro Yapacana: Mina Platanillal, La Cocina, Mina Nueva, Caño Rita, Caño Bocón, Caño Jabón (the latter two had not been mentioned in previous reports); 2) In savannah areas with a preponderance of grasses, shrubs and tree stands not subject to flooding: Maraya, Piedra Blanca, Cerro Moyo and other points with unknown names; 3) In other areas: Yagua (at the southern end of the park) and Caño Cotúa.

This document gives an account of the location of the mining camps, normally situated 2 kilometers away from the excavation area in order to avoid being surprised by the authorities during the night. This study also confirms what was reported earlier by INPARQUES, namely, that the people staying there consisted of *criollos* and indigenous people, as well as foreigners, and their numbers fluctuated according to the season, increasing during the dry season and decreasing during times of greater rainfall. At Mina Maraya, there had been as many 2,000 people at any one time, but many had left because of unfavorable living conditions and others, mainly Colombians, left upon receiving news that there were other places with greater amounts of gold. Among the indigenous people there were Puinabes, Curripacos and Guajibos, mostly from Colombia, as well as Piaroas and, to a lesser extent, Macos and others from Venezuela. Among these peoples there were those who worked exclusively as hunters and fishermen, thus providing the miners with their food supply, and there were others whose job it was to transport merchandise.

The extraction method is described by the SADA-Amazonas report: "The extractive activity begins with the deforestation of areas of interest, done manually using an axe or a power chainsaw, followed by consecutive cuts along the subjacent soil layers, using a pick and shovel, until the gold-bearing layer is reached. This layer is

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ The seat of Atabapo Municipality, a population center where indigenous people belonging to different ethnic groups live, especially those belonging to the Arawak linguistic group.

then separated from the rest of the soil, followed by the separation of the gold ore using the concentration method, based on the difference in the specific gravity between the gold and the waste material, or by rinsing it using a *batea* (a gold miner's pan)."²² Interestingly enough, no mention is made of the use of the amalgamation process that uses mercury.

As for the means of transportation and the routes utilized by the miners, the SADA-Amazonas report states that people, food and merchandise are transported by the following means: a) By river: access to the park is gained by means of the different waterways that are tributaries of the Orinoco or Ventuari rivers. Also used are clandestine *picas* (pathways hacked through the forest underneath the canopy), thus avoiding the National Guard's mobile checkpoints. Merchandise and food supplies are transported mainly during the rainy season when navigation becomes more favorable due to the higher water levels. b) By land: Some of the *picas* have been cut through the wooded area that starts at the edge of the Caño Pimichín and end at the Orinoco River, where there is access to the national park. This route is used mostly by foreigners. c) By air: Light aircraft that take off from Colombia fly at treetop level and toss dry goods at previously arranged locations, generally using the Caño San Miguel route.²³

The Human Rights Office of the Apostolic Vicariate of Puerto Ayacucho issued a report concerning the mining activity problems: "Human Rights Situation in the State of Amazonas" (1998).²⁴ This report states that one of the principal focuses of mining activity in Amazonas lies along the Yapacana-Maraya axis. In this area, and in all other illegal mining sites, which means all mines in the state of Amazonas, human rights violations are being committed regarding disrespect for indigenous peoples and their traditional customs, the exploitation of children working there practically as slaves, the rights of women belonging to indigenous, as well as *criollo* groups, regardless of whether or not prostitution is involved, the right to an education as there is the temptation to drop out of school as a result of the luring effects of the gold mines, and the right to health, given that mercury is contaminating their water supply, among other things.

3.2. Years 2000 to 2016

The Delegated Ombudsman's Office for the State of Amazonas (an institution created in 1999) received different complaints and petitions from some of the indigenous communities, located in Atabapo Municipality, concerning mining activity and its consequences for Yapacana National Park. A complaint regarding this situation had already been filed with the 94th Detachment of the National Guard at San Fernando de Atabapo, but there had been no reply. The complainants had

²² BIOPARQUES 2007. Op. cit.

²³ Idem.

²⁴ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yUz48ibI3eBT1e4iCsPuQgCQYsvDiAWs/view>

denounced the National Guard's complicity in the illegal extraction of gold, which the National Guard had been allowing in exchange for benefits, which included access to the gold itself. In 2003, in response to these complaints, the Office of the Supreme Prosecutor for the state of Amazonas, the Office of the National Prosecutor with Jurisdiction over Environmental Matters, Customs Headquarters at Puerto Ayacucho, the Environmental Stewardship (National Guard), and the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources conducted an inspection of the lowlands adjacent to Cerro Yapacana. In reference to the observed impacts, the report stated that at Mina Nueva the deforestation had involved approximately 5 hectares of tall dense forest, where there were trees taller than 25 meters (75 feet). The report further noted "the severe removal of soil, the resulting diversion as well as stagnation of waterways, with the resulting accumulation of solid wastes along their waterways, possibly contaminated by mercury."²⁵

An interviewed source revealed that, in April of 2004, representatives from indigenous communities along the Atabapo River had complained about mining activity by Colombian and Brazilian citizens inside Yapacana National Park. These miners had been using the Caño Caname waterway, a tributary of the Atabapo River, thus avoiding passage through Santa Bárbara, which is where there is a National Guard (GN) post. These representatives had filed the complaints with the GN itself, but there was no effective response from these officials. Since that time, it has become generalized practice by miners from these two neighboring countries of Colombia and Brazil to avoid the GN checkpoint by navigating along this waterway.²⁶

Another interviewed source revealed that residents of the indigenous community of Cárida filed a complaint in May of 2004 with different State entities, among them being the Public Ministry, concerning the presence of more than 800 Colombian and Brazilian miners inside the national park. According to the complainants, the miners were consuming alcohol, possessed firearms and would not allow Venezuelans into the area.²⁷

The court record pertaining to a decision rendered in the year 2005 ²⁸ shows that the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB), the new name given to the Armed Forces by the Constitution of 1999, had detained 81 foreign nationals, consisting of 55 Colombians and 26 Brazilians, at the town of Cárida. These individuals had been involved in mining activities and were in the possession of equipment used for

²⁵ Informe de la Defensoría del Pueblo de Mayo 2003, cited por BIOPARQUES 2007. Op. cit.

²⁶ Interviewee No. 41. This route: Atabapo - Caño Caname - Cárida - Yapacana is still widely used in 2018.

²⁷ Interviewee No. 12.

²⁸ Tribunal Penal de Control del Circuito Judicial Penal del Estado Amazonas. *Decisión de Juzgado Tercero de Primera Instancia en lo Penal en Funciones de Control de Amazonas, de 5 de Mayo de 2005. Jurisprudencia en medida de protección ambiental. Asunto: XP01-S-2005-000032 <*

<https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/fiscalia-septima-287038075> Researched on 30 NOV 18.

extracting gold from YNP, which would thus impact the ecosystems.²⁹ The court record shows that on 02 February of 2005 the court received official communication No. 0525, issued by the 52nd Infantry and Jungle Brigade (Army), informing the Public Ministry that aerial reconnaissance conducted by that garrison's command verified the presence of mining activity in the protected area, where some locations had been subjected to total deforestation.³⁰

Between 2004 and 2017 there was a brief period during which some of the public institutions took action, in the way of proceedings that were more or less systematic, in order to abate mining activity in Yapacana National Park and other areas of the state of Amazonas.³¹ This came about mainly because officials of the Prosecutor's Office, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Ministry of the Environment, and criminal court judges with jurisdiction over this entity decided to take action to counter the already evident complicity between Venezuela's Armed Forces and actors responsible for these illegal activities, that is to say, the Colombian guerrillas, acting in conjunction with mining organizations from that country and from Brazil, and with other participants, including merchants and providers of supplies.

On 16 August 2005, The Third Court of First Instance in Criminal Matters for Preliminary Proceedings in Amazonas issued an order to prohibit entry of "Type D" heavy extractive machinery, horizontal machines and motorized water pumps, as well as spare parts and accessories utilized in running these machines, consisting of rotors, multi-row cultivators, pistons, bases, crankshafts, hydrojets, hoses with adjustable nozzles, serpentine belts for motors, rolls of hose of different diameters, for which shipment to the southern region of the state of Amazonas could not be justified. The court ordered that the use of motorized water pumps and hoses utilized by indigenous communities for obtaining water be regulated by means of an official inventory of any such equipment located near mining sites, including the environs of YNP.³²

Furthermore, according to the account given by an eyewitness, throughout the decade beginning in the year 2000, indigenous communities in the area of YNP, the Atabapo River, and other areas of the middle Orinoco basin and the Ventuari River have been intimidated not only by the invading miners who arrive from Colombia

²⁹ Op Cit.

³⁰ Op. cit.

³¹ Even though the Armed Forces rendered only partial support. At many sites they continued to "look the other way" in the case of mining activities and the presence of the guerrillas by complicity and corruption.

³² FISCALÍA SÉPTIMA MINISTERIO PÚBLICO, 2005. *Decisión de Juzgado Tercero de Primera Instancia en lo Penal en Funciones de Control de Amazonas, de 16 de Agosto de 2005. Jurisprudencia en protección ambiental* < <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/fiscalia-septima-ministerio-publico-287210807> > Researched on 15 NOV 18.

on dredging rafts, but also by the guerrillas, who also come in by river from Colombia's Guainía department making use of the interconnections that exist between and among the Inírida, Guaviare, Atabapo and Orinoco rivers, and their tributaries and side streams, as well as through the *picas* that have been cut through the forests in order to gain access to the mining camps. The local inhabitants report no evidence of effective protection by the Armed Forces intended to prevent such trespassing, instead these military authorities abuse the indigenous people and settlers at their mobile checkpoints, where they rob them of their food, their fuel and even their gold. This testimony serves to demonstrate this situation of major corruption.³³

Between June and December of 2013, representatives from the Indigenous Organization of the United Piaroas of the Sipapo (OIPUS), went on two occasions to the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the National Assembly to denounce the presence, in Venezuela's indigenous territories, of illegal miners, Chinese transnational mining companies, and guerrilla groups from the officially demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the effect these groups were having on the lives and customs of the Wottuja and Jivi peoples of the Sipapo River basin.³⁴ This is not in direct reference to Yapacana, but is important because it reveals what is happening simultaneously throughout the region.

In May of 2013, the indigenous communities living in the basins of the Sipapo, Cuao, Autana, and Guayapo rivers, as well as the middle Orinoco river, forwarded a communiqué to the representatives of the Colombian guerrilla organization FARC-EP that was present inside their own territories for the purpose of stating to them their objection to such presence, insofar as, according to the worldview and culture of their ancestors, the habitat they have been occupying for millennia is being threatened by mining activity that is being aided and abetted by none other than the guerrilla forces.³⁵ Likewise, as before, this is not in direct reference to Yapacana, but is important because it reveals what is happening simultaneously throughout the region.

In May of 2014 the indigenous organizations of the state of Amazonas released a communiqué concerning the matter of mining activity in Atabapo Municipality and in Yapacana National Park wherein they clearly denounced what has been

³³ According to interviewee No. 16, in February of 2005, indigenous members of the community (confidentially) denounced that a group of Colombian and Brazilian miners were operating at the Yureva mine, in Atabapo Municipality, and had been present for months in an area near Cerro Yapacana with "suction dredges and water pumps" with the approval of GNB officials.

³⁴ PROVEA, 2018. *Desde 2013 comunidades indígenas denuncian presencia de guerrilla y grupos armados irregulares en Amazonas y Bolívar*. Provea. 6 de noviembre <<https://www.derechos.org.ve/actualidad/desde-2013-comunidades-indigenas-denuncian-presencia-de-guerrilla-e-irregulares-a-amazonas-y-bolivar>> Researched on 04 DEC 18.

³⁵ Idem.

happening and they state their position. Because of its significance, we are providing the following copy:

"On this day, 05 May 2014, we the indigenous peoples and communities of Venezuela's Amazonian region, gathered together as the Leadership of the Indigenous Organizations of Amazonas (COIAM), meeting at Puerto Ayacucho, State of Amazonas, hereby wish to express our conceptions regarding the practice of ILLEGAL MINING ACTIVITIES IN ATABAPO MUNICIPALITY, which affects our constitutional rights to the territory (Art. 119), and to a healthy environment (Art. 127) by declaring the following:

1. The grassroots indigenous organizations wish to express their deep concern resulting from the increase in illegal mining activity (gold mining) in Atabapo Municipality, which affects numerous indigenous communities in the region (Atabapo and lower Ventuari rivers) and the population of San Fernando de Atabapo proper, who have been denouncing the illegal mining activities along the course of the Atabapo River and throughout the entire area near Yapacana National Park.
2. During the past year (2013-2014), we have observed an increase in illegal mining activity along the course of the Atabapo River, through the use of vessels equipped with suction equipment, originating in Colombia, and which are being used for dredging the river bottom in order to extract gold in the international waters. The result of this activity has been the evident contamination of the pristine waters of the Atabapo River due to the presence of mercury and other toxic substances, as well as the alteration of the river's ecosystem in general, including the life of numerous varieties of fish that are a source of food for the riparian indigenous communities and for San Fernando de Atabapo, the seat of the Municipality.
3. Meanwhile, throughout the entire area of Yapacana National Park, and the lower Ventuari River, activities involving the illegal extraction of gold and other minerals continue, mostly performed by foreign nationals from Colombia and Brazil, thus causing serious environmental damage such as the destruction of vast expanses of forests and woodlands, the alteration of the rivers' courses, the mercury contamination, and the deleterious effects on the numerous Amazonian ecosystems.
4. The illegal mining activity throughout Atabapo Municipality is accompanied by many other illegal activities, such as nationally-produced goods being smuggled out of the country, as well as fuel, prostitution and human trafficking, illegal entry into the country by foreign individuals, the presence of armed groups that generate violence, and trafficking in substances prohibited by law.
5. All these illegal activities, specifically the illegal mining activity on the Atabapo River and in Yapacana National Park, are matters of public record known throughout the communities and by the news media. Consequently, we are very much concerned by the lack of effective action by the Venezuelan authorities to control the problem that affects this vast border region.
6. We call upon the civil and military authorities of the Venezuelan State to take urgent and coordinated actions aimed at controlling the illegal mining activities of the so-called "suction rafts" along the Atabapo River, especially through bilateral actions with Colombia, and through permanent surveillance and control activities throughout the lower Ventuari River and Cerro Yapacana.

Signed by: Regional Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of Amazonas (ORPIA), Kurripaco, Baniba, Warekena and Yeral of the Guainía, Negro and Atabapo Rivers (KUBAWY), HORONAMI Yanomami Organization, United Piaroa Indigenous Organization of the Sipapo (OIPUS), Ye'kuana Organization of the Upper Ventuari (KUYUNU), Indigenous Women's Organization of Amazonas (OMIDA), Piaroa Teachers

Association (Madoya Huarijja), Piaroa Organization of the Cataniapo "Reyö Aje", Inga Council of Amazonas, Yabarana Organization of the Parucito (OIYAPAM), Jivi Kalievirrinae Indigenous People's Organization (OPIJKA), Piaroa Organization of Manapiare, Indigenous Youth Network of Amazonas.³⁶

In December of 2014, the Indigenous Women's Organization of Autana (OMDA) stated in a communiqué: "The presence of non-governmental armed groups identifying themselves as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) poses a threat to the life, self-determination and territorial Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Amazonas, a circumstance that overwhelmingly affects Indigenous Women." Different complaints filed with the authorities, and whose copies are on file at Venezuelan Education-Action Program (PROVEA), have given warning as to the likelihood that acts of violence may be committed against the communities. Despite reiterated communiqués and meetings, actions by these irregular groups have continued to this day.³⁷ This is not in direct reference to Yapacana, but is important because it reveals what is happening simultaneously throughout the region.

3.3. Chronology of actions by the Venezuelan State in response to mining activity in Yapacana National Park between 1987 and 2016

This section presents a schematic synthesis of actions by entities of the Venezuelan State in connection with mining activity in Yapacana National Park. Actions taking place between 1987 and 1993 are presented in the following table.

Table 3. 1 Field operations and inspections conducted between 1987 and 1993 at Yapacana National Park. Source: Inparques 1993 and Bioparques 2007.

Date	Government Entities Participating in the Inspections/Operations
1987 March	Inparques
1987 September	MARNR
1988 September	Inparques –MARNR – MEM
1989 March	National Guard (GN)
1989 November	National Guard (GN)
1990 February	National Guard (GN)

³⁶ LA CLASE.INFO: COIAM, Sobre la minería ilegal en el municipio Atabapo <<http://laclace.info/content/sobre-la-mineria-ilegal-en-el-municipio-atabapo/>> Researched on 28 NOV 18.

³⁷ PROVEA, 2018. Op. cit.

1990 March	GN – MARNR – ORAI – MCM - Office of the Agricultural Solicitor
1993 April	GN (Piedra Blanca area)
1993 June	GN - Office of the Governor of Amazonas - Congressional Committee on the Environment - MARNR- INPARQUES
1993 October	GN – MARNR

The following is a summary of other actions of a political and administrative nature that were found during our systematic search:

- In 1988 a commission consisting of the MARNR, the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Defense Ministry and INPARQUES was created, its objective being to conduct a preliminary diagnosis and devise a work plan for adopting preventive and corrective measures concerning the situation of the three national parks in Amazonas, including YNP.³⁸
- The National Executive in consultation with the Council of Ministers issued Decree No. 269, published in Official Gazette as No. 4.106 Extraordinary dated 09 June 1989, by which mining extraction was banned throughout all of the Amazonas Federal Territory, while at the same time the order was issued to suspend all mining activity then underway. This decree still remains in force.
- In 1993 inter-institutional meetings were held for the purpose of tackling the problem of mining activity in Yapacana with the participation of principal players having responsibilities at the regional level, namely the National Guard, the Army, the Catholic Church, the Office of the Governor of the State of Amazonas, the Office of the Mayor of Amazonas (of which there was only one as of that date), INPARQUES, the MARNR, the Public Ministry, the Office of the Attorney for Indigenous Affairs, the Office of the Agricultural Solicitor, and the agricultural courts, among others. Nevertheless, the representative from INPARQUES noted in a report relating to that year's case that, unfortunately, these meetings did not yield any results or actions effective enough to accomplish any control over mining activity in the National Park.³⁹
- In April of 2012 the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) conducted an operation called the Caura Plan, which resulted in Regional Command No. 9 arresting 20 individuals having connections to the miners at YNP, and they were turned over to the Public Ministry. A press release from the Ministry of the Interior and Justice stated that the detainees, consisting of 6 Venezuelans and

³⁸ BIOPARQUES 2007. Op. cit.

³⁹ Inparques 1993. Op. cit.

14 Colombians, were part of an organization that lent logistical support (food, liquor and fuel) to the illegal mining camps. Five portable radios, 1 shotgun, 1 solar panel, 4 wooden vessels, 4 outboard motors and approximately 1 ton of food were confiscated at the "Mendejaque" mine, where these individuals were staying. Furthermore, 10 improvised shacks, 2 five-horsepower mining dredges and 1 electric generator were ordered destroyed at 5 mining camps.⁴⁰

- On 15 May 2012 the Public Ministry succeeded in incarcerating 2 Colombian citizens for their alleged connection to the illegal extraction of minerals, which occurred on 10 May in the area of Mina Nueva, located inside YNP. They were likewise accused of the alleged handling of dangerous materials, partaking of illicitly obtained goods and participation in organized crime. On the day of the arrest, GNB troops confiscated 16.6 grams of gold and 44.4 grams of mercury (Source: Pubic Ministry).⁴¹
- In June of 2012 members of the GNB assigned to Detachment 94 (San Fernando de Atabapo) arrested 4 individuals for conducting mining activities in the Mina Fibra sector of YNP. One firearm, one dredging machine and other equipment were confiscated from the detainees, according to information from the Director of Information and Institutional Relations, by way of his Twitter account.⁴²
- Also in June of 2012, soldiers belonging to Border Detachment No. 94 of the GNB arrested 5 individuals who were performing illegal activities, allegedly related to the extraction of ore inside YNP. Brigadier General José Eliézer Pinto Gutiérrez, at the time head of Regional Command No. 9 (CORE 9), reported that the arrests took place during 2 operations performed by a river patrol commission at 2 areas inside the National Park. In the Mina Fibral area, 4 individuals were arrested, one of them of Colombian nationality. They had in their possession a 16 mm caliber rifle, 5 unused cartridges, an electronic scale, and a wooden *bongo* (a long slender canoe used for transportation on shallow streams). Elsewhere, near Cerro Yapacana, in the Caño Cotúa area, an undocumented Colombian national was arrested. He had been transporting merchandise illegally. The military spokesman explained that upon inspection of the *bongo* belonging to the arrested individual, they found two 40-horsepower outboard motors, as well as boxes containing food

⁴⁰ CORREO DEL ORINOCO. *Este jueves. Guardia Nacional desmanteló banda de minería ilegal en Amazonas* 26.04.12 < <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/guardia-nacional-desmantelo-banda-mineria-ilegal-amazonas/> > Researched on 17 NOV 18.

⁴¹ CORREO DEL ORINOCO. *Privan de libertad a 20 personas por ocupación ilícita de áreas naturales en Amazonas. Entre los detenidos se encuentran 12 colombianos* 29 JUL 13 < <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/privan-libertad-a-20-personas-por-ocupacion-illicita-areas-naturales-amazonas-2/> > Researched on 02 DEC 18.

⁴² CORREO DEL ORINOCO. *Detienen mineros ilegales en Parque Nacional Yapacana de Amazonas* 15 JUN 12 < <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/detienen-mineros-ilegales-parque-nacional-yapacana-amazonas/> > Researched on 02 DEC 18.

supplies, and alcoholic beverages intended for delivery to mining camps. During the operation, orders were issued to destroy 5 improvised mining camps, 2 dredging machines and 80 meters of 4 inch hose used for extracting gold-bearing ore. (Source: AVN).⁴³

- In July of 2012, according to an official source, a reforestation plan for YNP was supposed to begin, as part of activities aimed at the environmental recovery of areas affected by mining activities. A joint commission of the Ministry of the Environment and the GNB had begun the task of dispersing seeds belonging to species specifically endemic to the region, and planting azaí palm, ice-cream-bean tree, and balsa tree seedlings. José A. Zambrano, at the time Director of the Ministry of the Environment for Amazonas, reported that the reforestation consisted of planting 8,000 plants and dropping from an MI-17 helicopter 400,000 seeds within a 17-hectare perimeter on the slopes of Cerro Yapacana, where the ecosystem has been degraded by the extraction of gold. "With the help of the National Bolivarian Armed Force, we have scheduled over-flights during the upcoming months for the purpose of disseminating aggregated mixtures of soil and seeds that are in the process of germinating, representative of diverse fast-growing species."⁴⁴ There is no record of any follow-up or evaluation of the effectiveness of the procedure. .
- In July of 2013 the Public Ministry was able to order the incarceration of 12 Colombian nationals and 8 Venezuelans that had been arrested on 17 July in connection with the illegal occupation of natural areas of YNP in the Mina de Caño Moyo sector. The 2nd Court of Preliminary Hearings for Amazonas, based on the evidence presented by the prosecutor, ordered the incarceration of those involved. The military commission that executed the action at that place confiscated several internet modems, decoders, satellite telephones, water pumps, and hunting ammunition, among other objects of interest (Source: Public Ministry).⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that this information reveals the magnitude of the miners' investment and the sophistication of their equipment.
- In August of 2014 the Ministry of the People's Power for the Environment and the GNB, as part of activities in commemoration of the 77th Anniversary

⁴³ CORREO DEL ORINOCO. *Desmantelan bandas dedicadas a actividad minera ilegal en Parque Yapacana* 18 JUN 12 <<http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/desmantelan-bandas-dedicadas-a-actividad-minera-ilegal-parque-yapacana/>> Researched on 04 DEC 18.

⁴⁴ CORREO DEL ORINOCO. *En el estado Amazonas / Ministerio de Ambiente y GNB inician plan de reforestación en el Parque Nacional Yapacana* 27 JUL 12. <<http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/ministerio-ambiente-y-gnb-inician-plan-reforestacion-parque-nacional-yapacana/>> Researched on 01 DEC 18.

⁴⁵ CORREO DEL ORINOCO. *Privan de libertad a 20 personas por ocupación ilícita de áreas naturales en Amazonas* 29.07.13 <<http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/privan-libertad-a-20-personas-por-ocupacion-ilicita-areas-naturales-amazonas-2/>> Researched on 02 DEC 18.

of the GNB, were supposed to prepare, plant and disperse 10,000 *avíos*⁴⁶ (pelleted seeds or seeds packed in fertilized humus) at the affected sites, Mina Nueva and Piedra Blanca, in YNP. According to the source, the plan included collecting 92,500 kg of seeds from several species, namely, the azaí palm, the little short sehe palm, the tall sehe palm, the balsawood tree, and the yagrumo tree. According to the official news media, 5,000 holes were dug for subsequent planting, thus resulting in 6 hectares of reforestation consisting of 1,000 acacias, 1,500 gamhar trees,⁴⁷ 2,000 cashew fruit trees, and 500 yagrumo trees. These activities were conducted under the leadership of Regional Command No. 9 of the GNB, and the Amazonas Office of the aforementioned ministry, with the participation of officials from *Misión Árbol* (Mission Tree).⁴⁸ There is no record of a follow-up or evaluation of the effectiveness of this procedure, which in our opinion is very unlikely to yield the expected results.

⁴⁶ The manner in which seedlings or seeds are bundled together with fertilized humus for reforestation processes. Whenever this involves pelletized seeds they are often called "seed bombs."

⁴⁷ Exotic species of Asian origin (our own observation)

⁴⁸ CORREO DEL ORINOCO. *En el Parque Nacional Yapacana / Min-Ambiente y GNB realizaron actividades conservacionistas en Amazonas* 06 AUG 14 <<http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/min-ambiente-y-gnb-realizaron-actividades-conservacionistas-amazonas/>> Researched on 02 DEC 18.

Chapter 4

Current Situation of Gold Mining Activity in Yapacana National Park

4.1. General Aspects

Before revealing the current situation at the mines in an objective way, based on detections made available by satellite imagery, it is important to become familiar with the place names for the gold mines currently located in Yapacana National Park (YNP). Table 4.1 shows the place names of the more commonly known mines, as reported in the literature and in conversations with individuals that were interviewed.

Table 4. 1 Place names for current gold mines or those recently identified inside Yapacana National Park. Source: prepared by the authors.

1. Cerro Moyo. 2. Maraya. 3. Piedra Suspiro. 4. Caño Cotúa. 5. Mendejaque or Wendehacke* 6. Fibral.* 7. Cacique.* 8. Base del Cerro Yapacana* 9. Mina Nueva. 10. Caño Oso. 11. Caño Bocón. 12. Puerto Tigre. 13. Caño Pavón. 14. Caño "S".	15. Caño Perro de Agua. 16. Chupadero. 17. Platanillal. 18. Mina La 40. 19. Yagua. 20. Viejita.* 21. Caño Rita. 22. Yaga. 23. Caño San Andrés. 24. Piedra Blanca. 25. La Cocina. 26. San Antonio. 27. Caño Carmen.
*Mines located adjacent to Cerro Yapacana	

It is important to emphasize that this list does not include all of the mining sites; there are local sources stating that there are approximately 44 mining sites. Nonetheless, this total is not precise given the likelihood that some may have been abandoned for one reason or other. Also, it is evident that mines with an upward trend in their production tend to expand and blend or merge with others, as has

been happening with those located in the vicinity of Cerro Yapacana. In this sense, it is more accurate to speak of "mining sectors" instead of individual mines, which then makes it necessary to delimit these sectors, which we do in another section of this report.

Today, the most salient features in the national park's landscape are the destructive scars that the mining activity has left, and continues to leave behind, and reflect processes that entail the drastic removal of the vegetation cover and the geological substratum. This is the result of deforestation resulting from slash-and-burn practices, and of the modification of the topography resulting from the excavations and displacement of rocks and soil, which also results in waterways changing their course. Much of this can be seen in places where the geological alteration layer has been removed, leaving behind craters that resemble an aerial bombardment. Added to this are the pathways, roadways, and excavations, as well as the mounds of tailings, all appearing in just a short time. Furthermore, it is safe to say that there is pollution originating in the mercury utilized in the separation or extraction of the gold from the alluvial or rocky geological material. This contamination results not just from material being dumped on the ground and into bodies of water, but also from the mercury vapors that adhere to the surrounding vegetation. In the established socioeconomic system of this mining area one finds that pioneering prospectors are the first to set up the mines in the first place, and then come others who take advantage of existing sites that have already been mined or have been abandoned. Here we will not delve into describing the technical processes involved in mining, and we suggest that interested readers read the report, *Current Gold Mining Situation in Canaima National Park: A World Heritage Site in Venezuela*. ([CLICK HERE⁴⁹](#)).

The mines are established on the open spaces of the grassy savannahs as well as in wooded areas, atop the plateau's panorama, as well as in and among the rough and elevated topography locations such as Cerro Moyo and Cerro Yapacana. There are also mining operations on rafts along the main waterways in the interior of YNP, as well as along its boundaries marked by the Ventuari and Orinoco rivers, all inside the Park.

4.2. Dredging rafts

The dredging rafts, known locally as *balsas chupadoras* (suction rafts), have appeared as a vanguard throughout the tangled mesh of gold mining operations now evident in the state of Amazonas. They can be spotted along the entire length of the mid Orinoco River, downstream from its confluence with the Atabapo River, and also in the national park along its main waterways, the Orinoco and the Ventuari rivers, which serve to mark its southern and northern boundaries respectively, as well as the Caño Yagua and other waterways that flow through the

⁴⁹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yUz48ibI3eBT1e4iCsPuQgCQYsvDiAWs/view?usp=sharing>

protected area. From the Yagua area there are many reports concerning the presence of rafts from Colombia, and to a lesser degree from Brazil. As of the year 2018, there was information about gold being extracted from 32 rafts on the waters of the Caño Yagua, crewed by armed personnel.⁵⁰ Starting at the southern boundary of YNP, they use their vessels, protected by the Colombian guerrillas, operating upstream along the Orinoco as far as La Esmeralda, in Alto Orinoco Municipality, where a new focus of gold mining activity has been created, and where hydraulic monitors are being used, as well as quicksilver (mercury), as it has become routine to use this liquid metal throughout the region's gold mining operations. Most of the dredging rafts navigate into the Orinoco from its large tributaries in Colombia, especially the Guaviare and Inírida rivers, which flow in from the Colombian department of Guainía. A high percentage of this department's area consists of territory legally designated as "indigenous reservations." Within the 7,129,245 hectares (ha) that make up the department's surface, there are 28 reservations.⁵¹ Mining activity has been present in this department for several decades; meanwhile, in the "reservations" there are mining areas worked by indigenous miners. In Colombia, there has been a back-and-forth hesitation concerning the legal framework for mining operations in these territories, all of which has served to encourage dredging rafts to navigate into the bordering countries of Venezuela and Brazil, making use of the lower end of these large rivers where they flow into the Orinoco.

Certainly, mining rafts are responsible for mercury contamination, and this affects the riverbeds. The dredging rafts are of different sizes and types. Some are transported to the mines in completely disassembled form. Others "...are freely transferred, visible to everyone, along international rivers that border on the state, with no compunction by the authorities in the bordering countries, or by those in Venezuela; they drift past our indigenous villages, along international navigation rivers where no agreement has been reached on how to regulate them."⁵²

4.3 Individual locations and extent of the mining areas

The individual geographical locations and the extent of all the mining activity areas in YNP were differentiated through the use of high spatial resolution satellite images. Thanks to support from Radiant Earth and Digital Globe, we had access to a vast database of images from different years, some of which were very recent. As of November of 2018, we had identified 36 mining activity areas in the Park spreading over approximately 2,034.94 ha (Appendix 3) - an area equivalent to ten (10) times the area of the Principality of Monaco or close to that of 1,884 soccer fields (each covering 1,08 ha) - distributed throughout 3 large sectors, designated in this report

⁵⁰ Interviewee No. 25.

⁵¹ PORTAL INDIGENA Y GOBERNANZA, 2006. *Resguardos Indígenas en la Amazonía y la Orinoquía* (Col) <http://www.territorioindigenaygobernanza.com/col_07.html> Researched on 11 DEC 18

⁵² FISCALÍA SÉPTIMA MINISTERIO PÚBLICO, 2005. Óp. cit.

as: Cerro Yapacana, Cerro Moyo-Ventuari and Maraya (Figure 4.1). In the Park, the mining activity having the greatest extension is found in the Cerro Yapacana sector with 1,294.81 ha, followed by the Cerro Moyo and Maraya sectors with 589.34 and 150.79 ha respectively (Table 4.2).

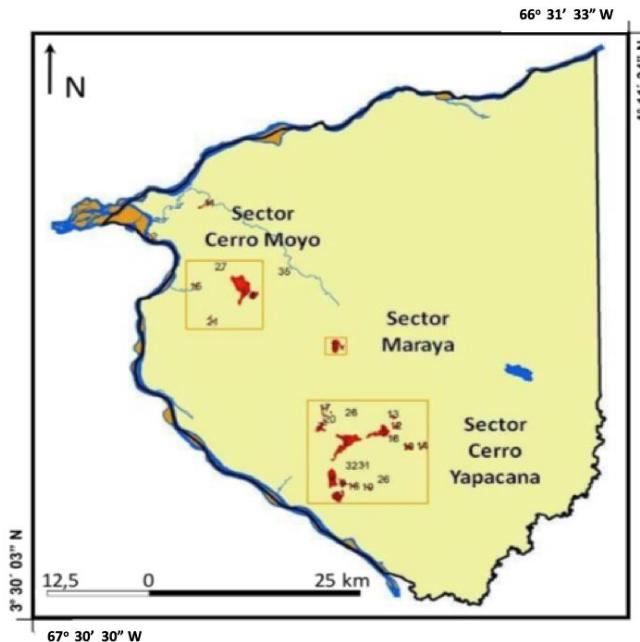


Figure 4. 1 Surface localization of mining activity in Ypacana National Park, by sectors (year 2018). Source: prepared by authors

Table 4. 2 Surface, in hectares (ha) affected by illegal gold mining activity (by sectors) up until the year 2008 in Ypacana National Park. Source: prepared by authors.

Sector	Surface area affected (ha)
Cerro Yapacana	1,294.81
Cerro Moyo-Ventuari	589.34
Maraya	150.79
Total	2,034.94

It is important to emphasize that compared to all other national parks in Venezuela, YNP has the greatest surface area affected by gold mining activity. Similarly, when we compare it to other national parks, in relative terms, as for example with Canaima National Park (3,000,000 ha), YPN (320,000 ha) has the higher mining

activity density per total Park surface area (6.36×10^{-3}), thereby exceeding by a wide margin that of Canaima National Park (0.17×10^{-3}). In other words, when comparing both national parks, YNP would have an index 37 times greater than that of Canaima National Park and, in absolute terms, a surface area, affected by mining activity that is 4 times greater.

The mining activity situation in Venezuela, particularly in YNP, stands out as the most alarming when compared with the rest of the countries that are part of the entire Amazonian region. According to information reported by RAISG (2018), obtained up until the year 2018, a study by organizations from six countries of the Amazonian region (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) confirmed the existence, in this region, of at least 2,312 centers (Table 4.3), distributed over 245 areas, which were engaged in the "illegal mining" of minerals such as gold, diamonds and coltan. The study further identified thirty (30) rivers where there was mining activity, or which served as waterways for bringing in machinery and supplies, or for transporting the mineral products out of the area (Figure 4.2).

Table 4.3 demonstrates that Venezuela's Amazonian region, in relation to the Amazonian regions of countries such as Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, shows the greatest degree of mining activity, as reflected in the large amount of "illegal mining" centers (82.14%). Similarly, according to the RAISG report (2018), the case having the most significance in Venezuela's Amazonian region is YNP, where "...illegality became patent as a result of alliances between miners and dissident members of the Colombian guerrilla forces." The report also makes reference to "...the constant incursions by guerrilla groups in search of gold, diamonds and coltan. There is talk of the presence of as many as 2,000 men inside the area of Yapacana NP." These are mostly Colombians and Brazilians.⁵³ This makes YNP the area with the greatest increase in mining activity in recent years in the state of Amazonas, as is demonstrated in the next section of this chapter.

Table 4. 3 Number of "illegal mining" centers reported for countries of the Amazonian region in RAISG 2018.

Countries of the Amazonian Region	"Illegal Mining" Centers	"Illegal Mining" Centers as a Percentage (%)
Bolivia	-	-
Brasil	321	13.88

⁵³ RAISG (2018). Citing report on military corruption in the state of Amazonas, presented by representative persons and organizatons from the state of Amazonas. Puerto Ayacucho. 15 AUG 2016.

Ecuador	68	2.94
Peru	24	1,04
Venezuela	1,899	82.14
Total	2,312	

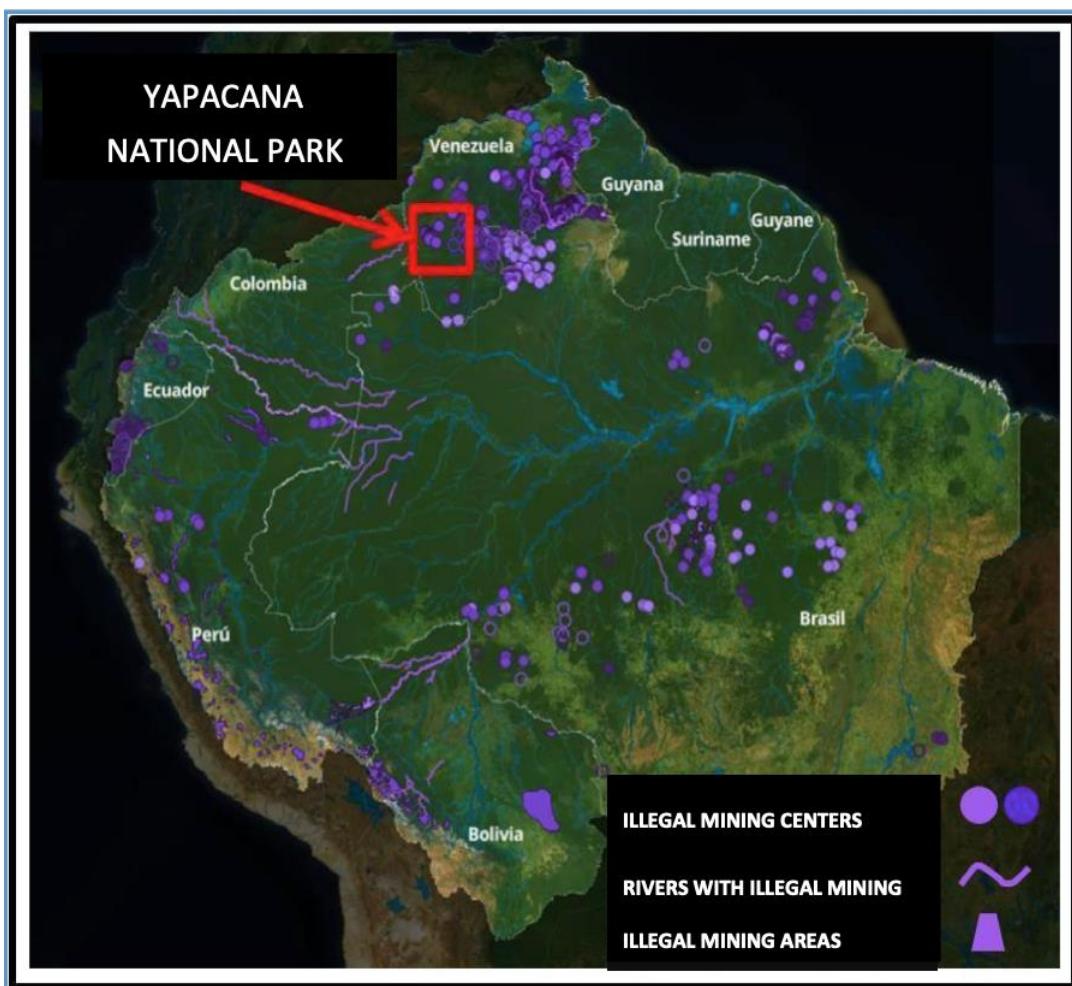


Figure 4. 2 Location of illegal mining activity in countries of the Amazonian region by RAISG 2018 using information from 2017. YNP location indicated by the present authors.

4.4 Detection of mining areas

The mining activity areas inside YNP were identified and the precise geographic location was verified through the use of high spatial resolution satellite images from sensors belonging to Landsat-7/ETM+, Landsat-8/OLI, Sentinel 2 y World View-2; all are available free of cost from Google Earth Pro, the United States Geological Service (USGS), the Radiant Earth Foundation⁵⁴ and the European Space

⁵⁴ Radiant Earth Foundation- Datos Geoespaciales de Libre Distribución para Impactos Positivos. 2018, Retrieved at: <https://www.radiant.earth/>. Researched on: 05 DEC 2018

Agency (ESA). The results of this procedure demonstrated the existence of a total of 36 mining activity sites, all of them detected by means of digital and visual interpretation of satellite images, during the period 2002-2018 (Table 4-4, Figure 2-3 and Appendix 3). The sites referred to constitute unequivocal proof of the presence of mining activity inside YNP. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize the existence of other mining activity sites covering less area, which could not be identified by means of the orbital data utilized in the present report, given that very high resolution sensors are required, and/or proper field verification down on the ground for correct identification. Furthermore, mining rafts cannot be detected either through this procedure. In this sense, quantification of the area affected by mining activity in YNP must be considered to be an underestimation of the real value.

Table 4. 4 Characteristics of the satellite images utilized in the detection of mining areas (by present study). Source: Prepared by the authors.

Platform/Sensor	Date Obtained	Spatial Resolution (m)	Level of Correction
Landsat-7/ETM	05 Jan 2002	15 (fusion of panchromatic and optical bands)	Orthorectified
Landsat-7/ETM	27 Jan 2004		Orthorectified
Landsat-7/ETM	20 Apr 2007		Orthorectified
Landsat-7/ETM	11 Jan 2010		Orthorectified
Landsat-7/ETM	02 Dec 2012		Orthorectified
Landsat- 8/OLI	29 Dec 2013		Orthorectified
Landsat- 8/OLI	27 Sep 2014		Orthorectified
Landsat- 8/OLI	3 Nov 2016		Orthorectified
Landsat- 8/OLI	26 Feb 2018		Orthorectified
Landsat- 8/OLI	25 Nov 2018		Orthorectified
Sentinel 2A	11 Mar 2018	10	Orthorectified
World View-2	13 Sep 2015	0.5	Without georeferencing

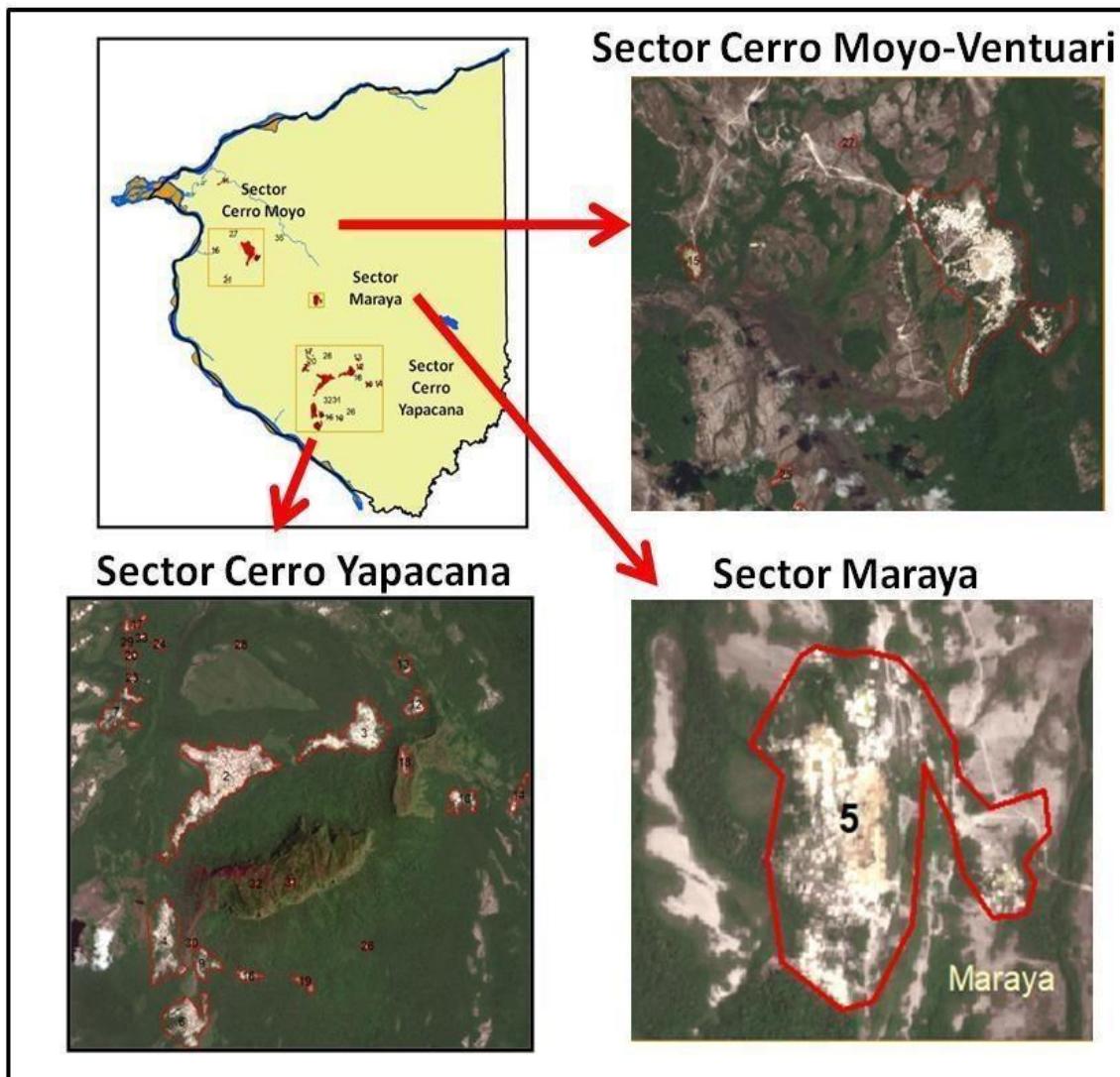


Figure 4. 3 Mining activity in different sectors of Yapacana National Park.

An example of the validation technique utilized in this report is presented in Figure 4.4, which demonstrates how the identification and verification of the mining activities in YNP were conducted through the use of high and very high spatial resolution satellite images, such as World View-2 (0.5 m), Sentinel-2 (10 m) y el Landsat-7 y 8 (15 m). The latter was obtained after fusion of the panchromatic band with bands from the visible range of the electromagnetic spectrum. These satellite images allowed us to appreciate the existence of mining activities, clearly identifiable through a pattern of anthropic intervention peculiar to gold mining, where one can appreciate the ground deprived of the vegetation cover so characteristic of YNP and the presence of ponds having a greenish-blue tonality. Furthermore, it is possible to identify the infrastructure and services incidental to the support of mining activities, such as roadways and landing strips. Another visual representation of the mining sites we have obtained using the aforementioned resources may be seen in the form of videos at <https://sosorinoco.org/illicit-business/>.

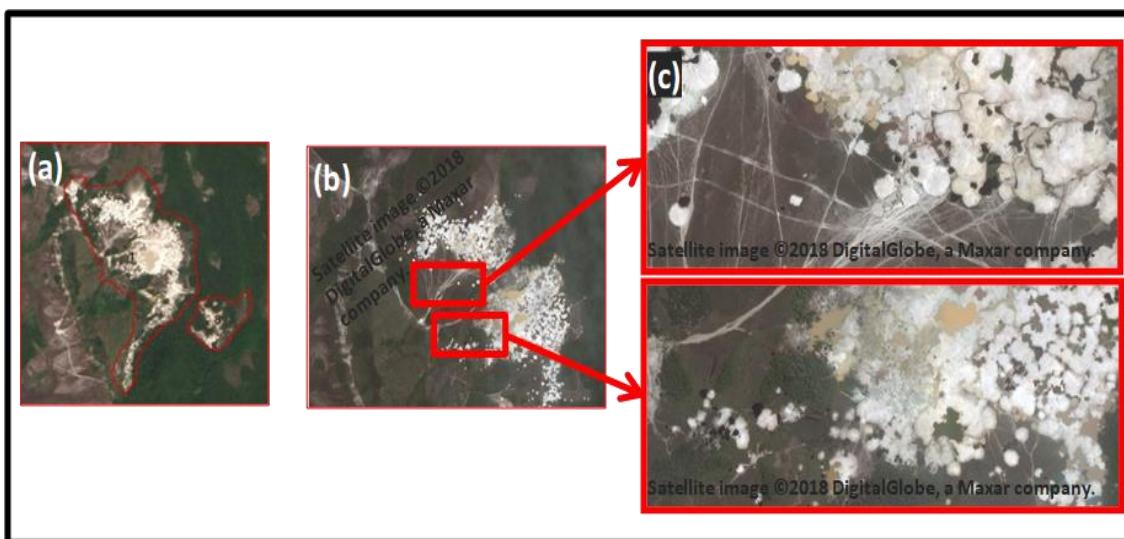


Figure 4. 4 Identification and validation of mining areas by means of high and very high spatial resolution images (Cerro Moyo-Ventuari Sector). (a) mining activity located by high spatial resolution image (Sentinel 2); (b) mining activity validated by means of very high spatial resolution image (World View-2); and (c) enlarged window of the World View-2 image.

4.5 Temporal analysis of the mining activity

Since the 1980's, there have been reports of mining activities inside YNP. However, the year 2002 marks the beginning of significant extractive activity inside the Park (Table 4.5 and Figure 4.5), detectable by satellite imagery; this activity went undetected using images available prior to this year. In relative terms, the increase in activity becomes apparent between the biennia 2010-2004 (145.89%) and 2012-2014 (90.44%); nevertheless, the biennium 2010-2012 is when the Park begins to be subjected to a sustained increase that manifests itself in the intensified mining practices that continue to this date (2018), when for the first time since the commencement of the mining activity in the 1980's, the intervened surface area reaches three digits (169.76 hectares).

Table 4. 5 Increase in mining activity, in hectares (ha), inside Yapacana National Park (temporal analysis 2002 - 2018). Source: prepared by the authors.

Year	Cummulative affected area (ha)	Temporal Increase (ha)	Temporal Increase (%)	Difference in temporal increase in relation to previous biennium/triennium (ha)
2002	34.06	-	-	-
2004	83.75	49.69	145.89	15.63 (2002-2004)
2007	144.96	61.21	73.09	11.52 (2004-2007)
2010	220.76	75.80	52.29	14.59 (2007-2010)
2012	390.52	169.76	76.90	93.96 (2010-2012)

2014	743.71	353.19	90.44	183.43 (2012-2014)
2016	1215.98	472.27	63.50	119.08 (2014-2016)
2018	2034.94	818.96	67.35	346.69 (2016-2018)

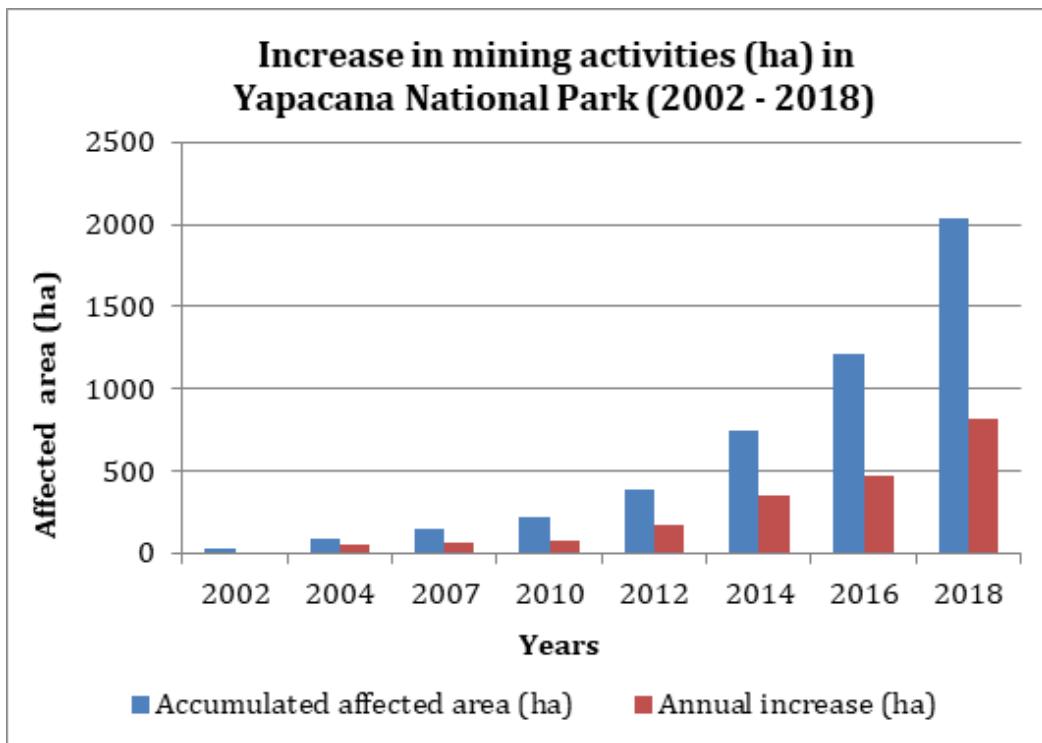


Figure 4. 5 Increase in mining activity, in hectares (ha), inside Yapacana National Park (temporal analysis 2002 - 2018). Source: Prepared by the authors.

However, the most remarkable aspect of the mining activity detected in YNP is the speed and intensity of the intervention during the last eight years (2010-2018) (Table 4-5 and Figure 4-5). The figures presented demonstrate that, with respect to previous biennia and triennia, in absolute terms, the intervened area more than doubled during the biennia 2010-2012 (93.96 ha, equivalent to 124% of the temporal increase in the triennium 2007-2010) and 2012-2014 (183.43 ha, or 108% of the temporal increase in the biennial 2010-2012); and it almost doubled in the biennium 2016-2018 (346.69 ha, or 73% of the temporal increase in biennium 2014-2016). Furthermore, if we analyze the increase in the total area affected by the mining activity in YNP, during the period with greatest significant mining activity (2002-2018), we will notice that the increase in intervention during these last 12 years was 2,000.88 ha (close to 5,975%), a considerably high figure for such a small protected area, which happens to be the smallest National Park south of the Orinoco River (the states of Amazonas, Bolívar and Delta Amacuro).

It is noteworthy that this sustained increment in the surface area affected by the mining activity in YNP has a positive correlation with the average increase in the price of gold (Figure 4-6). Therefore, one can infer that the sustained increase in the

price of gold between 2002 and 2012 and the intensification of mining activity in the park for that same period are related. Similarly, the more than doubling, or almost doubling, of the intervened area during the biennia starting with 2010-2012 until now, may be related, not just to this increase in the price of gold, but also to the tendency of the average annual price of gold to remain greater than US\$ 1,000 starting in 2012. Nevertheless, as the analysis will demonstrate in the following chapters, the price of gold is not the only incentive, or the sole explanation for this spiraling increase in mining activity in Yapacana.

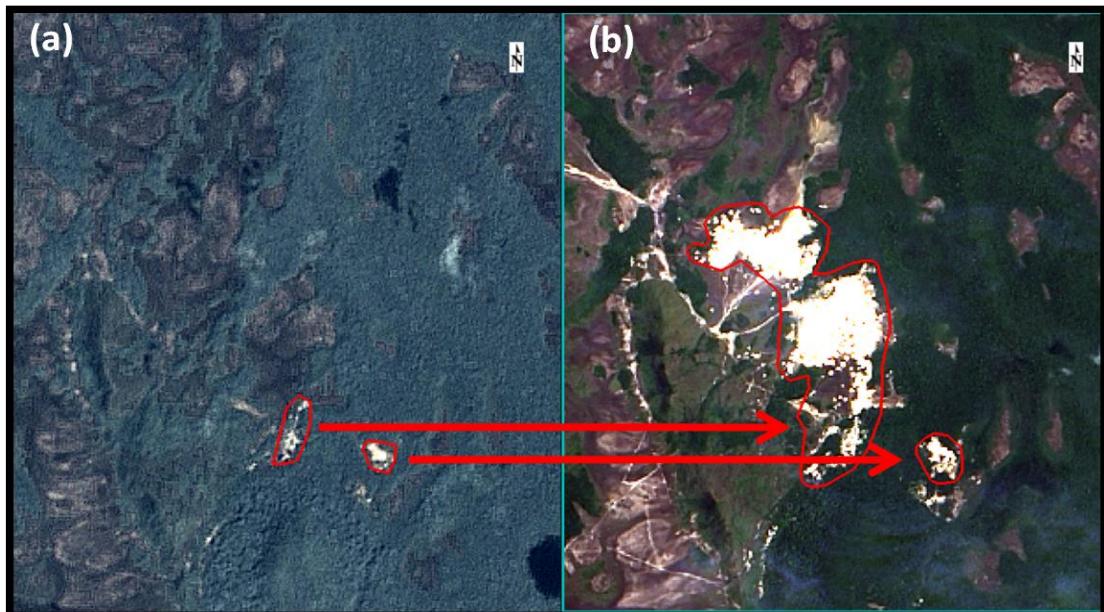


Figure 4.6 The increase in the surface area affected by the mining activity (193.21 ha) in the Cerro Moyo-Ventuari Sector (2002-2014). (a) Mining area (17.95 ha) detected by ETM+ Landsat Image on 18 DEC 2012; (b) Mining area (211,16 ha) detected by ETM+ Landsat Image on 27 SEP 2014. Both images are on the same scale.

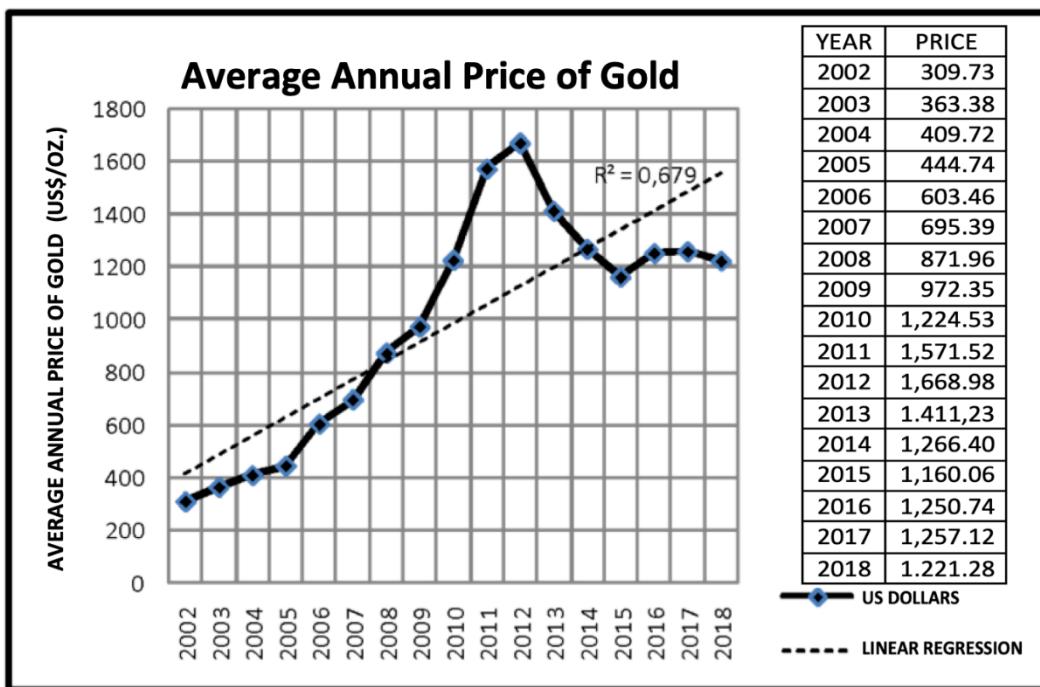


Figure 4. 7 Annual average price of gold (US\$/oz) (2002-2018). Source: The Statistical Portal (2018).

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The Statistical Portal. 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268027/change-in-gold-price-since-1990/>. Accessed on: 27 DEC 2018

Chapter 5

Players in the Complex Network of Mining Operations in Yapacana National Park

5.1. Players from the governmental institutions

In the systematic search or audit that was conducted, the following governmental institutions stood out as being related to the current situation in Yapacana National Park.

Table 5. 1 Governmental Institutions Having Current Relevance to the Situation in Yapacana National Park.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integral Defense Strategic Region - Guayana (REDI-Guayana): Bolivarian National Armed Force (GANB) ● Integral Defense Operations Zone - Amazonas (N. 63) (ZODI-Amazonas N. 63): Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB) ● Government of the State of Amazonas ● Regional Legislative Council of the State of Amazonas ● Public Ministry (Office of the Attorney General of the Republic) ● Ombudsman's Office ● Office of the Mayor of Atabapo Municipality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Office of the Mayor of Maroa Municipality ● Office of the Vice President of the Executive Branch ● Ministry of the People's Power for Indigenous Peoples ● Ministry of the People's Power for Ecosocialism. Office for the State of Amazonas ● Ministry of the People's Power for Internal Relations, Justice and Peace ● National Institute of Parks (INPARQUES) - Amazonian Region ● Council for the Protection of Children and Adolescents of Atabapo Municipality
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Among these, the National Parks Institute (INPARQUES) merits special attention. By law it is responsible for the administration and protection of national parks throughout the national territory. However, there is now very little or nothing that can be said about this institution. In the words of government officials at Puerto Ayacucho, "INPARQUES is nonexistent".

In similar fashion, it should be pointed out that the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), a branch of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB), the new name given to the Venezuelan Armed Forces under the new Constitution of 1999, by law has been given responsibilities to protect the environment and the natural resources (officially referred to as *guardería ambiental* - environmental stewardship). In this context its role is to be at the service of INPARQUES for the

protection of national parks. We will delve into greater detail about this later in the chapter.

Among other governmental institutions and entities, there are some that are not so obvious, but are playing an important role in the complex network of the mining operations at Yapacana and the entire Atabapo region. These are government intelligence and security agencies, such as the National Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN - political police) and the Office of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), known to have perpetrated a violent assault that resulted in the death of an indigenous male at a mine in Canaima National Park on 8 December 2018),⁵⁵ as well as the state-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), responsible for distribution of fuels, the state-owned Corporación Venezolana de Guayana (CVG), whose role it is to promote economic development in the region, the National Civil Aeronautics Institute (INAC), which has failed to exercise control of flights in the area, and has allowed illegal flights as well as the construction of illegal runways, the National Institute of Aquatic Spaces (INEA), the National Integrated Service for Customs and Taxes (SENIAT) with respect to customs enforcement, the Administrative Service for Identification, Migration and Immigration Control (SAIME), as well as the Foreign Ministry, given that this is an international border area. One must not underestimate the political role par excellence of the National Assembly, whose elected representatives from the state of Amazonas have been well aware of the situation, and remain so to this day. All of these governmental entities are involved in the YNP situation, by their own actions, as well as by their omissions. In particular, there are signs that some individuals in these institutions have been reaping economic benefits from the mining operations. Officers of the SENIAT are frequently identified as being "*matraqueros*"⁵⁶ for their acts of extortion for money and goods in the Atabapo region.

Finally, there is the Ministry of Eco-Socialism (MINEC),⁵⁷ which assumes the role of ministry of the environment. This ministry has ultimate responsibility for the situation at YNP, given that it has regional jurisdiction and that it governs over the National Parks Institute (INPARQUES)⁵⁸, which is the government agency assigned to the MINEC and bears legal responsibility for administering Venezuela's national parks. INPARQUES has no facilities other than a single office at Puerto Ayacucho, and is barely able to tend to the Piedra Pintada and Piedra La Tortuga natural monuments, which are located just a few kilometers from Puerto Ayacucho. In the rest of the state of Amazonas, INPARQUES is practically nonexistent, given that, in the realm of real politics, its role is of secondary importance.

⁵⁵ <http://www.2001.com.ve/en-la-calle/198059/incursion-del-dgcim-en-canaima-dejo-un-indigena-fallecido-y-tres-heridos---fotos-y-videos-.html>

⁵⁶ Venezuelan vernacular term referring to military authorities who collect bribes or commit extortion.

⁵⁷ <http://www.minec.gob.ve/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.inparques.gob.ve/>

5.1.1. The Military

The military chain of command at Yapacana is part of a pyramidal structure where the Office of the President of the Republic sits at the apex, followed by the Operational Strategic Command (CEO), in turn followed by the command of the Integral Defense Strategic Region (REDI), then by the command of the Integral Defense Operations Zone (ZODI) and finally by the command of the Integral Defense Area (ADI), with a military chief commanding each one of them. This territorial hierarchy matches the territorial political division: groups of States (REDI), individual States (ZODI) and Municipalities (AI)

Furthermore, the entire YNP area also lies within a Border Security Zone (ZBF), which is an Area Under Special Administrative Rule (ABRAE), as determined by the Organic Law for Management of the Territory (1983) and defined by the different laws of security and defense that exist. Specifically, the ZSF for the state of Amazonas encompasses nearly 10,800,000 ha and was created in 1998,⁵⁹ when administrative authority over this area was vested in the Defense Ministry, which had regulatory authority to restrict the ability of people to move about, the construction of buildings and facilities, and the ownership of real estate property by foreign nationals. Most of the state of Amazonas is affected by this ZSF. The overlap that exists between a national park and a ZSF should not pose any problem insofar as the ZSF is supposed to be supportive of national parks. However, there is mining activity, as well as associated logistical operations, inside the ZSF. In view of the magnitude of the unbridled increase in mining activity during last 20 years, it is unlikely that this has been happening without the Defense Ministry's knowledge and co-participation, passive or active.

The year 2005 represents a milestone in the history of participation by military players in legal and illegal mining activity throughout the country. Up until that date, the players that interacted with the miners in the state of Amazonas were basically members of the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB). The civil institutions mentioned in the previous section were all involved in mining activities through any one of many key officials, for example, from State and Municipal governments. In the year 2005, the Army, by presidential order, assumed control over the Regional Command No. 8 of the GNB (CORE 8) in the State of Bolívar, and CORE 9 in the State of Amazonas, which meant that the Army, the Navy and the Air Force then became involved in mining activities, not just in the State of Bolívar but also in Amazonas. This requires some explanation. Traditionally, the National Guard (GNB) component of the Armed Forces has had, and still has, jurisdiction for safeguarding natural resources, a function referred to as *guardería ambiental* in Venezuela. In fact, the original concept of the National Guard, in the late 1930's, was very much oriented toward their goal as forest rangers. Over the years, this military component has become more associated with civil dynamics, especially as it relates

⁵⁹ Decreto N. 2600 publicado en Gaceta Oficial 36521 del 20/08/1998

to wielding control over illegal trafficking in natural resources (fauna, wood, fishing and mining activities). Soldiers of the GNB were frequently associated with collecting *coimas* (bribes), *peajes* (tolls for going through), and commissions, plus all kinds of illicit payments derived from crimes of commission and omission associated with the use and sale of natural resources. Especially in Bolívar, the National Guard has been historically associated with corruption in gold mining activities, legal and illegal. The defense ministers, as well as the chiefs of the Operational Strategic Command (CEO, formerly known as the CUFAN) had always been aware of this. As the new national government installed itself starting in 1999, officers from other branches of the military, particularly the Army and the Navy, viewed enrichment by important officers of the National Guard with suspicion, this despite the fact that by tradition commanders of the Army Division of the Jungle Infantry in the State of Bolívar were also frequently identified as having received illegal benefits derived from gold mining activities. In 2005 pressure from these other military branches had its effect, and the CORE 8 was intervened, with the Army assuming control over it. Presumably, this occurred as part of a strategy designed by the incumbent political party to de-professionalize Venezuela's Armed Forces, and further imbue them with ideology to the benefit of the party. From that moment on, officers of the Army, Navy (specifically the River Marine Infantry) and the Air Force had presumably started to become powerful stakeholders in the complex network of illegal gold mining activities. This scheme is replicated in the state of Amazonas, and starting that year, now that there was a unified military command; four traditional components were now participating in the mining business (GNB, Army, Air Force and Navy). As part of the already explained framework of the hierarchical structure, this leads one to the conclusion that there is an element of responsibility, or of participation, throughout the military's entire chain of command. The new doctrine, begun in 1999, one that considers the Armed Force as a single unit, contrary to the traditional vision of separate components, leads one to believe that there has been a unification not only of the military command, but also of the distribution of benefits.

A significant decision entailed closing off the air space of the state of Amazonas to civilian aircraft. Prior to 2007, there were many flights by private transportation firms, air cooperatives, air taxi services, tourism operators, state agencies, etc., and all that a pilot needed to do was file a flight plan with the respective civil authorities. In that year, this earlier procedure was eliminated, and it became necessary to obtain explicit military authorization, which needed to be done several days ahead of time through a centralized procedure at Puerto Ayacucho. The argument put forward by the military was that this was being done only to comply with an order, which had been operant for years, claiming that most of the State of Amazonas was a ZSF and that this was intended to protect the environment by curtailing flights by aircraft involved in illegal activities that supported the mining

operations, and to protect indigenous communities from the *galimpeiros*⁶⁰ from Brazil, and from other illegal miners. This measure cast a cloak of secrecy over the nature of this military deployment into the state. Finally, it is important to report that, going back several years, Venezuelan authorities, military or civilian, have not had the technical means necessary to monitor the air space over the state of Amazonas, or follow through if necessary. On the other hand, Colombian authorities have access to such technology.

The mechanism formerly utilized by officials of the GNP (CORE 8 and 9) as a way to collect their share of the gold from the mines was to send officers periodically to collect their part of the material, and to do so also at mobile checkpoints, such as central "posts" being located at Santa Bárbara, San Carlos de Río Negro and San Fernando de Atabapo. In this way they seized part or all of the material the miners were transporting. This material flowed from the "posts" until it reached the commander general of the GNB in Caracas, and at each stage a portion of the material was surrendered to the respective military chief. It appears that this trajectory was well known by the internal intelligence services of the other military components. These positions were so important that the military officers at these posts were assigned by their respective military chiefs in order to ensure loyalty and continuity for this activity. Reportedly, some officers even paid bribes at the GNB personnel office in order to obtain such positions.

A noncommissioned officer explained to us that, at a post near Cerro Yapacana, the periodic change of personnel assignments was conducted following all the military protocol pertaining to the case; however, the incoming chief was under obligation to meet privately behind closed doors with the outgoing chief for the purpose of weighing the gold that had been collected. The outgoing chief was supposed to take it to Puerto Ayacucho. Thus a record was established as to the quantity that was being transported. However, there was no guarantee that the outgoing officer had not hidden, for his own benefit, some portion that had not been accounted for. The source also stated that, when military aircraft were transporting civilian personnel for whatever reason, the internal protocol required prior notification to all miners in the area, by way of radio, so that they all had the opportunity to hide in the woods so that the civilians would not witness the current mining activity that was in full operation in the vicinity of the military outpost. This was specifically reported in the case of the Army outpost at Yapacana. The flight plan was carefully established so as not to fly over mines that were in full operation. It has been denounced publicly that the military are utilizing military aircraft to transport suction dredges or motorized water pumps to the mines at Yapacana.⁶¹ At a given moment there may have been as many as 20 suction dredges (using motorized water pumps), half of which belonged to military officers. In fact, the number of

⁶⁰ Nombre que se le da a los mineros brasileños que incursionan en forma organizada hacia Venezuela, cuyo centro logístico está principalmente en la ciudad de Boa Vista.

⁶¹ Entrevista en "El Periódico del Amazonas" – Puerto Ayacucho-, 1-15 octubre 2014, página 5

these machines at Yapacana has been increasing. Any reported figures would only reflect a specific moment in time.

Along with the current increased participation in the mining activity by the entire military structure in Amazonas, the mechanism has also changed. The guerrilla groups are collecting gold at every mining site: the guerilla groups collect from the owner or the person in charge of every production site, in the form of a would-be tax, a previously agreed upon percentage of the extracted material, based on weight. The guerrilla force acts as the sole collector at all the mining operations. Ultimately, a percentage of the total production is delivered periodically into the hands of the chief military officer at Puerto Ayacucho by an envoy or by one of the guerrilla chiefs in person. It seems logical that the chief military office would subsequently take care of distribution up and down the military chain of command. Given this scenario, it is perfectly understandable why no amount of gold will ever be enough. The more the gold flows through, the more necessary it becomes. It must be extremely costly to keep the entire scheme hidden and silenced. The officers at the command of the field posts, and their troops, no longer shake down or "racketeer"⁶² the miners directly at the mines. As part of the agreements with the guerrillas, this function has been exclusively relegated to the Colombian guerrilla organizations, to do otherwise would invite confrontations with them. Nevertheless, the military assigned field duty frequently set up mobile checkpoints, especially along the rivers, at access points outside of Yapacana and take it upon themselves to "impound" supplies belonging to the miners and to transients in general. Whenever they discover that these individuals are carrying gold, especially when they are away from agreed upon routes to and from the mines, the gold is seized. In these cases, the guerrilla groups apparently do not intervene. These new mechanisms that have been set in place guarantee more efficient collection and participation in the mine's production and encourages all of the miners to adhere to procedures that are ordered and controlled by the guerrilla forces. The benefit of all this is that the "racketeering" by the military disappears, so long as the procedures are adhered to. It is surprising to hear miners at Puerto Ayacucho refer to Yapacana as a "very pretty site" for mining, because order, available supplies, and predictability reign supreme there. It was not possible to verify whether the military officers at the posts also obtain direct payment from the guerrilla groups, but we were informed that the military posts are better supplied than they were some years ago.

Given this scenario, how does one explain why these military units occasionally conduct operations whereby miners are arrested and evicted? According to the results shown by our research, it becomes obvious that such operations are not so

⁶² Venezolanismo que proviene el inglés *racketeering* que significa despojo ilegal por parte de alguien investido de autoridad hacia un ciudadano indefenso
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/racketeering>

frequent, and are spread out over time and, according to our sources, when conducted, they are planned so as to punish miners who are not cooperating within the established scheme of things, current or former. In any case, these are simulations that do not entail any will to eliminate the mining activity. The advantage of conducting these simulations is the ample publicity they provide over the social networks and the government's news media, thus giving the public the impression that the military are acting to abate the mining activity in an honest and responsible way. But this is part of a strategy designed to have everything in that realm become cloaked in ambiguity, contradiction and uncertainty, which is the perfect way to keep this scheme operant.

Finally, the element that definitely clarifies the matter of military participation in these mining operations is the very existence of the Army post at Yapacana (See Table 5.1). This post was originally conceived with the idea of having it be the headquarters for a Jungle Infantry Brigade made up of approximately 1,500 troops, meant to make the eviction of the miners permanent and prevent their reentry, as well as to serve to engage in efforts to restore the environment. It was expected that there would be a research center there, established with the support of the Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research (IVIC) and other research institutions. This was proposed as part of the National Strategy for the Defense, Development and Consolidation of the South, something that was never executed. What is the explanation for the existence of a military post next to an immense illegal mine engaged in full operation in the middle of a national park? There is no possible explanation, except that the military component may be part of that same mining operation.

5.2. Civil society players in the State of Amazonas

Currently, the following organizations are relevant with respect to the problems under study.

Table 5. 2 Relevant civil society organizations to the situation at Yapacana National Park.

- Regional Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Amazonas (ORPIA). **Tw:** @OrpiaAmazonasVE
- Kurripaco, Baniba, Warekena and Yeral of the Guainía, Río Negro and the Atabapo. **Tw:** (KUBAWY)
- Aposotolic Vicariate of Puerto Ayacucho. Office of Human Rights
- Indigenous Organizations Leadership of Amazonas (COIAM). **Tw:** @coiam14
- Wanaaleru - Amazonian Indigenous Women's Organization **Tw:** @Wanaaleru
- Amazonian Indigenous Human Rights Movement (MOINADDHH)
- Wataniba - Socio-Environmental Task Force of the Amazonian Region – Wataniba. **Tw:** @Wataniba_ve
- Kapé-Kapé Civil Association <https://kape-kape.org/quienes-somos/>

Some civil society organizations in the State of Amazonas have played a fundamental role in revealing and denouncing diverse problems present in the area. Approximately twenty grassroots indigenous organizations have come together as a group into the regional organization ORPIA, as well as into COIAM, the platform being used of their activist agenda. Furthermore, several NGO's dedicated to defending human rights and those of the Amazonian Region are allies in the indigenous movement.⁶³ The sudden increase in mining activity, the presence of the Colombian guerrillas, the drug trafficking, the outward-bound smuggling of subsidized fuels, the abuse by the military, as well as their active participation in these and other crimes, have brought about denunciations by these organizations not only in the form of public communiqés but also by way of letters and meetings with the governmental institutions bearing responsibility, such as the Office of the Executive Vice President of the Republic, the Operational Strategic Command of the FANB, the ZODI-Amazonas, and others.

However, as a consequence of the state of Amazonas having been occupied by Colombian guerrilla force, that organization has been exercising its influence so as to demobilize indigenous organizations, who in turn have been resorting to an increasingly pronounced and worrisome silence in response to the increasing evidence of outrages associated with the mining operations scheme. This withdrawal by the indigenous movement has been the result of two principal strategies: first, the death threats and homicides perpetrated against members of these organizations, and secondly, the recruitment of the more important leaders by the guerrillas by offering them perks, political campaign financing, and other political and monetary favors.

More than half of the inhabitants of the state of Amazonas (54%) are indigenous, this state being the one with the highest proportion of indigenous population, as well as being one of the states with the greatest ethnic and cultural diversity, as there are 20 different indigenous peoples. During this mining boom in Amazonas, the indigenous people have borne the brunt of the impact with respect to the environmental destruction of their habitat, but even more so at the socio-cultural level. It was referred to as such in one of the decisions handed down by the criminal court for this state (previously mentioned). The acculturation, the modification of their idiosyncrasy, and the usurpation of their lands and the resources are leading to the destruction of a society and its environment. Most likely, this damage may be irreversible. One must also consider the damage to their health, particularly due to exposure to mercury and workplace accidents at the mines, but also due to sexually transmitted diseases and other illnesses such as malaria and measles, which have

⁶³ When we talk about an "indigenous movement" in this report we are referring to informal groups of individuals and organizations (indigenous and non-indigenous) that have assembled around the topic or setting of indigenous right and not because they have grouped together under some form of incorporated organization.

become epidemic precisely because of the prevalent lack of health measures throughout all of the southern part of the country.

5.3. The Colombian guerrilla groups

Without a doubt they are the key players necessary for explaining the situation in Yapacana National Park. When we talk about the guerrilla groups we are basically referring to the ELN and to groups that have supposedly disaffiliated themselves from the FARC and are acting concertedly as it is presumed that there is a "guerrilla consortium" that we already have referred to by using the generic term "guerrilla groups" and will continue to do likewise throughout this report. We are talking about what is considered to be the second most powerful criminal organization in Latin America. An updated account of what the ELN is can be read in *Insight Crime*.⁶⁴ Appendix 5 delves into abundant detail in reference to the presence of the guerrillas in the state of Amazonas and its surroundings. The goal being pursued by the ELN is expounded upon in the next chapter, where there is an explanation of the role of Yapacana as a key territorial element within the framework of their strategy.

The guerrilla contingent in Amazonas is currently estimated to consist of 4,000 troops (Ebus 2018)⁶⁵. It is a well-known fact that Colombian guerrilla groups are positioned in the states of Amazonas and Bolívar in coordination with Venezuela's Armed Forces and authorized to be there by the national government. As a way of presenting proof of this, in Appendix 6 we reproduce the written record of an assembly that took place in October of 2014 at a village called Pueblo Hoti de San José de Kayamá, in the state of Bolívar near the border with the state of Amazonas. Even though this is geographically remote from Yapacana, it is important because it demonstrates the broad deployment of guerrilla groups in the state of Amazonas without there being any reaction from the Venezuelan military aside from the existence of a political agreement of coexistence and cooperation.

⁶⁴ <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/gamechangers-2018-los-ganadores-del-crimen-en-latinoamerica-durante-2018/>

⁶⁵ Ebus, B. 2018. Digging into the Mining Arc. Research led by Infoamazonia in association with Correo del Caroní.

Chapter 6

The Strategic Importance of Yapacana: The True Origin of the Problem

Today, 1,200 hectares of Yapacana National Park's surface area are being subjected to absolutely destructive gold mining activity. The impact on its ecosystems can be stated not only in terms of the surface area that has been destroyed but also in terms of the radial and expansive effect due to the presence of more than 2,000 miners currently occupying the national park. This undoubtedly causes Yapacana to have the highest level of destruction among Venezuela's 44 national parks. The mining activity was already present starting in the mid 1980's, but its growth began to accelerate in the year 2004 and became exponential starting in 2012 and 2014.

We have already demonstrated the permanent presence of Colombian mining organizations operating illegally in Yapacana National Park, and in the rest of the state of Amazonas. These organizations come mainly from the Colombian departments of Guainía (whose capital is Inírida) and Vichada, as well as other Colombian departments in the Orinoco basin, where a specialized mining culture has developed around the extraction of alluvial gold deposits during recent decades. Basically, these organizations are the ones that have imported the technology that uses rafts equipped with suction dredges on the rivers, and hydraulic monitors (water cannons) on dry land. All of these techniques utilize the gravimetric method (sluicing) that includes the use of *tapetes* (miner's moss mats) to trap the gold particles, as well as the amalgamation method that employs mercury.

The proximity of Yapacana to the border with Colombia also entails being inside the sphere of influence of the armed conflict that has been waged for many decades by the Colombian State and Marxist armed organizations, known generically as "the guerrillas." It is a well-known fact that their financial resources are derived from theft, kidnapping, extortion, growing coca and selling its cocaine derivatives and smuggling highly subsidized petroleum products and food out of Venezuela, as well as extracting natural resources.

Mining activities at Yapacana are currently being conducted and controlled by this complex network of organizations whose origin, command and structure originate in Colombia's territory, particularly in the departments of Guainía, Vichada, Vaupés and Arauca. Of course this includes participation by Venezuelan *criollos* and Brazilians, plus minority participation by indigenous people from all three countries. This situation has consolidated and grown to dimensions of strategic importance during the last 10 years, due to a political and ideological affinity that has materialized into the close political and economic cooperation that now exists

between high-level Venezuelan officials (military and civilian) and this Colombian network.

While gold extraction at YNP began to be detected and seen as a problem in the late 1980's, it was not until the late 1990's, and particularly at the beginning of the 21st century, that this mining activity inside YNP began to fall under the control of guerrilla groups from the neighboring country of Colombia. The record shows that starting in the early 1990's there was an ever increasing number of armed individuals coming in from that neighboring country, showing their presence at the mines and on the dredging rafts at Yapacana, and on the Atabapo and Guainía rivers, and in other border areas,⁶⁶ all of this being denounced by communities in that region.⁶⁷

The presence of guerrilla groups, paramilitaries and smugglers in this Amazonian territory has been known for more than 30 years.⁶⁸ Liborio Guarulla, of the indigenous Baniwa people, and state governor from 2001 to 2017, denounced invasive activities by armed groups such as the Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) inside the municipalities of Atabapo, Maroa, Río Negro and Alto Orinoco, yet the Venezuelan Army made no effort to expel them.⁶⁹

Furthermore, they are currently (year 2018) present not only at Yapacana National Park but also at many other locations in the state of Amazonas (Orinoco, Atabapo, Guainía, Sipapo, Guayapo, Upper Cuao, Manapiare, Ventuari, Parucito, Majagua, Ocamo, Siapa, Asisa and Parú rivers, as well as their tributaries and minor streams). In almost all cases, their presence is associated with mining activity and the environmental damage it causes.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ All of this appears on the record resulting from operations conducted by the National Guard and judicial proceedings.

⁶⁷ Described in *Informe: Actividades Mineras Ilegales en el Municipio Guainía (Maroa)- Estado Amazonas* prepared by anthropologist Silvia M. Vidal, del Ivic, and Edilto Bernabé Dabuema, of the indigenous Warekena group. 1997. p. 7. Here is a denouncement from the text: "Starting in February of 1995, the Kurripako indigenous group from Victorino began to denounce the contamination of the Guainía River and its aquatic fauna as a result of operations by approximately 16 dredging rafts and the indiscriminate use of mercury that was being used by miners of different nationalities who had come from the Colombian part of the river. Apparently, the dredges and other equipment had been brought into the area all the way from the Inírida River by way of a dry season road. Although the miners are of different nationalities, their chiefs are Colombians. Nonetheless, what frightened this indigenous group the most was the fact that these miners were armed."

⁶⁸ ESCANDELL, H. 2017 feb. ¿Derribaron el helicóptero militar en Amazonas? <<http://revistasic.gumilla.org/2017/derribaron-el-helicoptero-militar-en-amazonas/>> Accessed on 10 Dec 18.

⁶⁹ Op. Cit.

⁷⁰ Interviewee No.23.

Apparently, the geographical space of YNP had initially been under the control of the FARC, but starting in 2016 it reportedly fell into the hands of dissidents from this guerrilla group, specifically former members of the "Fronts" known as the "16" and the "Acacio Medina," in charge of an operational sphere that spans along the Guainía, Vichada and Arauca rivers and ends in Venezuela's Guayana region. Then, sometime between 2016 and 2017, there were uncorroborated reports that the "transfer of the emblematic tricolored armbands" from the FARC over to the self-proclaimed National Liberation Army that operates in the department of Vichada (Colombia) and in Venezuela had been finalized. Given this scenario, it is very likely that Yapacana may now be under the control of a consortium made up of "ELN/FARC dissidents." Appendix 5 renders a detailed account of the relations between these groups in the context of the state of Amazonas. Puerto Ayacucho and surrounding areas have been ELN territory for several years.

A reading of the results of the systematic search (see Appendix 1) concerning the topic of the guerrilla groups is sufficient to convince one that it is a fact that the mines at Yapacana and Venezuela's entire Amazonian region are under their control. Nevertheless, as one delves deeper, everything points to the fact that the presence of the guerrillas entails much more than just territorial control. It points toward a complex network controlled by the guerrillas, including all the components of this entire business that is linked to the guerrillas, including finances, logistics, operations and commercialization. The leadership of this web has its headquarters at Inírida, Colombia. Atabapo is the intermediate control center, but Inírida is definitely the command center. When we speak of the guerrilla groups today we are referring to the ELN and about groups that have supposedly disaffiliated themselves from the FARC and are acting concertedly. This leads one to believe that there is a "guerrilla consortium," which we identify generically throughout this report as the "guerrillas". Funding for the mining operations appears to come largely from proceeds derived from drug trafficking controlled by that organization. It is almost impossible to isolate activities connected with mining from those that are associated with drug trafficking. Furthermore, the drug trafficking activity provides the funding for the gold mining operations whose product enters into the "legal" market without any traces or marks indicating illegality. Thus, gold provides the financial "legitimacy" that makes it possible to maintain the guerrilla organization. In this sense, Yapacana is a giant money laundering operation used to legitimize these funds, but it is also an economic and financial safe haven for these organizations. There is no doubt that most of the gold from Yapacana is marketed by way of Colombia, and a good portion of the gold production reported by that nation most likely originates at Yapacana and Atabapo. The gold route probably runs through Inírida, Medellín and Bogotá. Of course, a significant portion of that may be entering Venezuela's economy by way of bribes and commissions received by Venezuelan government personnel (military and civilian).

Yapacana could very well be called the "territorial" manifestation of an "ELN State," that is to say a State that possesses the three existential elements: a population, a territory, and power. It even enjoys de facto recognition from the Venezuelan government. The configuration of its territorial space, whose borders are defined by rivers, a sort of "inland island," makes this image of the State have an additional and real meaning: when one crosses the river one is entering into the ELN's country. This is a country whose borders are physical and tangible. There is also information that the headquarters or offices of some of the principal guerrilla chiefs are located inside YNP.⁷¹ Furthermore, the only law in Yapacana is the "law" of the guerrillas. They impart "justice," ensure the food supply and provide medications, medical assistance, and even education. Inside YNP there are schools where the teachers are paid in gold as a way of making them stay in their profession and not be tempted to engage directly in the mining operations.⁷² Their "law" states, "If you break the rules a third time, we will kill you," and it appears to be strictly enforced, especially in cases of robbery or theft. This exaggerated image of the State strongly suggests that Yapacana is a perfect "sanctuary" for the guerrillas, with de facto consent from the Venezuelan government. Yapacana is like a magnet that attracts people (miners and providers of services) from all the neighboring population centers, including Puerto Ayacucho, and even cities as far away as Caracas, where it is known that women are hired and brought in to render prostitution services.

Going beyond what is likely to be the most important center for generating liquid funds for the guerrillas, as well as being their "sanctuary," Yapacana appears to be playing another strategic role in that organization's intentions. It is well known that for at least 20 years the guerrillas have controlled the entire axis defined by the Atabapo River, as one goes upstream toward the Río Negro and the Casiquiare Branch, which is one of the three fundamental mainstays of Venezuela's Amazonian region. Furthermore, the guerrillas are currently shifting their presence upstream along the Orinoco and have already reached La Esmeralda, in Yekwana territory, and settled there. Likewise, since at least 2014 it has become apparent that the guerrillas have moved upstream along the Ventuari and have gone in on foot, through Hoti indigenous territory (see Appendix 6), toward the Caura River basin and also into Yekwana territory along the upper Ventuari River. For some years the Kuyunu organization has been dealing with pressure from the miners and the guerrillas that are going into the area. This would seem to lend evidence to the existence of an operation that aims to control two avenues of access into the state of Bolívar. By going up the Ventuari River, one gains access to the Caura River basin, which in turn gives access to the Paragua, Caroní and Ikabarú rivers, as well as to the Great Savanna (see Figure 1.1).

⁷¹ Eduardo Alvarez Vanegas, Daniel Pardo y Andrés Cajiao. 2018. *Trayectorias y dinámicas territoriales de las disidencias de las FARC*. Publicación de FUNDACIÓN IDEAS PARA LA PAZ. Abril de 2018. Serie Informes N. 30 <http://viva.org.co/cajavirtual/svc0584/pdfs/FIP_Disidencias.pdf> Consulta del 12.12.18.

⁷² Interviewee No.74

Another very active route, one used by miners and the guerrillas, is the old road that connects San Juan de Manapiare to Caicara del Orinoco. This route also gives access to the Parguaza River basin, where coltan is currently being extracted (also an area controlled by the ELN). Recent news reports concerning the violent events that have taken place in recent months in the mining district of El Callao (state of Bolívar) speak openly of the ELN's incursion there and their control over those mines⁷³, and the violent confrontations between the ELN and the "syndicates"⁷⁴ that had been exercising control over that territory up until recently.

In that regard, evidence of guerrilla movement toward the headwaters of the Orinoco and their having settled into the Caura region, and now into El Callao, gives credence to the existence of a plan to control all of southern Venezuela. The geographical space known as the Mining Arc⁷⁵ may also be ultimately controlled by the guerrillas in following with the evident alliance that they have with the Venezuelan government, regardless of who is conducting mining operations in that arc (formal or informal, legal or illegal, or small, medium or large capital investments). Furthermore, the entire geographical space to the south, and outside of the so-called Mining Arc may eventually be controlled by the guerrillas, who would be managing all the "illegal" mining activity that would take place in that space, following the same pattern that has been apparent in Atabapo and Yapacana, in other words, this would result in territorial and financial control over the mines using indigenous and *criollo* personnel.

On the assumption of a definitive military defeat (or "demobilization" or "peace accords") in Colombian territory, these guerrilla groups could very well settle in Venezuela indefinitely, thus assuring themselves of unlimited financial resources derived from the gold and other minerals. On the assumption that they continue to wield control on Colombian territory, they would likewise have a base for logistical and financial operations, likewise unlimited. In any case, it is evident that Yapacana is the gateway for gaining the territorial control required by any future guerrilla plan. It is a font of wealth and a key to gaining strategic access under any option.

Should mining be banned from YNP, whereby it would cease to produce gold and begin to be controlled by Venezuela's legal and legitimate institutions, the guerrillas would then lose their financial sustenance and would not be able to keep open their avenues of internal access to the state of Bolívar, nor their territorial control over the interior of the state of Amazonas.

⁷³ <http://talcualdigital.com/index.php/2018/10/19/guerrilla-colombiana-tiene-el-control-de-al-menos-4-minas-al-sur-de-bolivar/>

⁷⁴ organizaciones criminales controladas por "pranes". Ver informe de SOS Orinoco sobre el caso de Canaima <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yUz48ibI3eBT1e4iCsPuQgCQYsvDiAWs/view>

⁷⁵ <https://arcominerodelorinoco.com/>

Chapter 7

The Need to Rescue Yapacana National Park

The Importance of Yapacana

We have been able to determine, with a fair amount of accuracy, the magnitude of the physical scars that have been left behind by mining activities at Yapacana National Park, and have succeeded in understanding the dynamics that lie behind these scars. Given the political will and appropriate measures, the physical and ecological impact on YNP can be reversed or at least conditions may be created so that Nature may take care of healing them (at least those that are most visible). Nevertheless, what is happening at Yapacana has repercussions that go well beyond the environmental and are of national and international dimensions. YNP has become a social and political "vortex" that casts out debris and destruction that reach the most remote spaces of Venezuela's society. While on the other hand, it has become a "magnet" that also attracts those pernicious factors.

The primary victims are the indigenous peoples, but they are not alone. This situation must be resolved with urgency, and it requires the return of the Venezuelan State, its institutions, and its laws, and that all of it be administered by appropriate and honest people. Those who today pull the strings that move the structure of the Venezuelan State have abandoned the state of Amazonas and they have done so deliberately with the intention of leaving it in the hands of an alien and corrupting entity in order to obtain political and economic benefits in what constitutes a negative deed, unprecedented in Venezuela's history. This situation persists, furthermore, with the complicity, by action or omission, of the Colombian authorities, which have also abandoned their exercise of sovereignty over their own territory adjacent to Venezuela, while the Venezuelan government has allowed the guerrillas to use areas on their side as safe haven (albeit with sporadic police/military actions), making it possible for a large portion of Venezuelan gold to enter into Colombia.

Message for Venezuela

Mining activity in Yapacana National Park can and must be eradicated, thereby accomplishing huge benefits for all of the state of Amazonas and the country. A plan must be devised to do this, and it must be defined as a new national policy toward the state of Amazonas. Beginning in the late 1970's, Venezuela had been drafting this policy, step by step, under the rubrics of a policy for conservation, and starting in the 1980's, with a policy directed at the protection of indigenous peoples.⁷⁶ This

⁷⁶ In 1987 the Venezuelan Senate prepared draft legislation for the Organic Law of Indigenous Communities, Peoples and Cultures. It was approved in two rounds of discussions necessary for its approval by the Senate, and at one round at the Chamber of Deputies, but did not reach the necessary second round (1995). Articles 199 to 126 of the Constitution of 1999 are derived from this draft

must be a policy whose mainstay is the quest for sustainability as part of a diversified economy, focused on non-extractive activities, with an absolute respect for Protected Areas, and which must be designed in accordance with previous, free and informed participation by the indigenous peoples, as established by human rights standards. A giant step in this direction was taken recently by Venezuela's National Assembly when it passed the Organic Law on the Creation and Protection of the Mega Fresh Water Reserve and Biodiversity of the Southern Orinoco region and of Venezuela's Amazonian region.⁷⁷ This law provides necessary guidelines and must be executed as soon as possible. In any case, Venezuela's policy must be its own, and one would wish that it could be shared with the neighboring countries of Brazil and Colombia. Nevertheless, it must not be subordinated to policies established by these countries. By having a solid Rule of Law, with absolute control over its own territory and the functions of its own institutions, it will be possible for Venezuela to maintain this new policy regardless of the policy fluctuations of its neighbors.

Fundamental mainstays of this policy are the territorial regulations that have been delineated in its Protected Areas (ABRAE), and now by this Organic Law on the Mega Reserve. By enforcing the pertinent protection standards of "zero mining activity" inside national parks and natural monuments the necessary conditions will be set for implementing any policy of sustainability for the region: the elimination of mining activities at Yapacana is the fundamental key for all of this.

Message for the International Community of States

The strategic importance of Amazonia as a grand region where eight countries live next to each other can never be overemphasized. The situation at Yapacana complicates the already complex relations among these States. The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) must take it upon itself to recognize what is happening and address what is happening at Yapacana, because that generator of environmental, social and cultural destruction is spilling over into neighboring countries. Within the context of the Organization of American States (OAS), Venezuela has certain obligations as a signatory to the Convention on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere.⁷⁸ The situation at Yapacana stands in absolute violation of this convention under whose auspices Venezuela has developed its policy on national parks, and continued toleration of this situation infringes upon the effectiveness and purpose of efforts made by the

legislation, based on a synthesis of its fundamental resolutions. This draft legislation, with some modifications, was promulgated in 2005 under the name of Organic Law of Indigenous Peoples and Communities.

⁷⁷ http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/_an-sanciono-proyecto-de-ley-organica-de-creacion.

Also, another reference in this respect is provided by Escandell García, H. 1995. Amazonas Estrategias de Desarrollo y Participación p. 43-61. In: Carrillo, A. and M. A. Perera, eds. 1995. Amazonas modernidad en tradición: Contribuciones al desarrollo sustentable en el Amazonas, Venezuela. SADA Amazonas – CAIAH – Ministerio del Ambiente y de los Recursos Naturales Renovables – GTZ. Caracas. 391 p.

⁷⁸ <http://www.oas.org/juridico/spanish/tratados/c-8.html>

countries of the Western Hemisphere for more than 70 years. It is necessary that the regional organizations, ACTO and the OAS, urge Venezuela to put an end to this mining activity, to the benefit of the international community.

Message for Colombia

It is important that the Colombian State recognize its responsibility for not having curtailed its own internal situation, which has materialized into entrenched and extensive activity by the guerrillas along the Orinoco River where it marks the border with Venezuela. Therein lies the root of the extremely grave situation that has existed at Yapacana since the middle of the interval 2000-2018. The decisions to plan and execute interventions in the National Park are made in Colombia, and Colombia is the principal economic beneficiary of this illegal situation. If the mining activity at YNP is not eradicated, the perpetuation of guerrilla activity in Colombia's departments of Guainía and Vichada, where nearly 80% of Colombia's cocaine is produced, will become a reality. It is in Colombia's best interests to lend encouragement and collaboration so that Venezuela may reestablish its full sovereignty over the entire state of Amazonas, and the key to that lies in remediating the situation at Yapacana. There is no doubt that this will have a negative impact on Inírida's currently unsustainable economy, but to a large extent therein lies Colombia's effort and commitment: to have the Colombian State gain full control over its departments along the border with Venezuela and to have its regional economy be driven by activities that are not of an illicit or ecocidal nature.

Message for Brazil

The Brazilian State is not exempt from responsibility for the situation at Yapacana, which is obvious because its citizens, together with indigenous people and Venezuelan *criollos*, are also material and financial participants in the illegal extraction of gold at Yapacana. But that cannot be considered without taking into consideration the close political and ideological ties that have existed between the governments of Brazil and Venezuela between 2003 and 2016. The vortex at Yapacana certainly has not gone unnoticed by Brazil's security and intelligence services. By tolerating the implementation of a guerilla pseudo state in Venezuela's Amazonian region, Brazil is running the risk of having these guerrilla troops become key players in the economic, social and political dynamics of the Brazilian states of Roraima and Amazonas. It is in the best interest of Brazil to have Venezuela reestablish full sovereignty over its own territories and abolish mining activity at YNP.

Message for International Civil Society, NGO's and Others

Amazonia has been on the agenda of international civil society organizations; not only because of its grand natural heritage and the role its forests play in regulating the world's climate, but also because it is home to a cultural diversity that is under threat. It is a known fact, and at the same time disconcerting, that hardly anyone

has called attention to the situation at YNP. It was but a few weeks ago that the RAISG⁷⁹ project reported and emphasized the regional implications of the grave situation at Yapacana. It is an outrage that this situation has gone unnoticed for 20 years. All non-governmental organizations dedicated to the rights of indigenous peoples and to the conservation of biodiversity must now direct their attention and actions toward Yapacana. Not only is it the largest and most important focus of "illegal mining activity" in all of Amazonia, which in and of itself justifies a call for action, but it is also a managerial model that has proven to be destructive of the environment and of indigenous societies, and, sad but true, can be replicated quite easily in any Amazonian area where organized criminal organizations are active, and where the national states are prone to institutional weakness; in other words (to a greater or lesser degree) in any part of Amazonia. Non-governmental organizations that operate on an international scale must now pressure ACTO, the OAS, Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil to agree to dismantle the complex network of mining operations at Yapacana. The IUCN⁸⁰ needs to play a special role, as it is a highly respected international organization that occasionally speaks out⁸¹ in cases of initiatives that affect the integrity of Protected Areas that may perhaps be less relevant than the case of Yapacana.⁸² We would expect from the IUCN and its member organizations a gesture of consideration toward Venezuela and in defense of the Amazonian region: this report now makes it possible for these organizations to speak up.

Message for Venezuela's Civil Society

Venezuela's social and environmental civil society organizations have been less than effective in introducing into the public agenda the clearly visible matter of what is happening at Yapacana. What are the reasons? We are well aware of the effectiveness of the coercion wielded by the Venezuelan government over those who denounce these issues, and also of the overly justified self-censorship. But we also know that some social and indigenous leaders with ties to the government's party have succeeded in creating divisions in the indigenous and environmental movement. Some of these upper echelon leaders maintain close ties with the guerrillas and are definitely pro-mining. In this respect, the message to civil society is to raise the ethical, environmentalist and pro-indigenous banners and speak out so that people may hear the denunciations concerning the destruction of Yapacana and the violation of the human rights of indigenous and *criollo* citizens in the state of Amazonas. That is the least that can be expected. Environmental and indigenous struggles must absolutely go hand in hand. The policy for protected areas runs

⁷⁹ <https://raisg.socioambiental.org/>

⁸⁰ This is an organization whose institutional members are other NGO's, as well as governmental entities.

⁸¹ <https://portals.iucn.org/library/resrec/search>

⁸² Here one may find an example where the Peruvian government is urged to stop construction of a highway through a national park:

https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2016_RES_092_ES.pdf

perfectly parallel to the aspirations of the indigenous peoples, and this policy leaves no room for mining operations.

The academic world has also overlooked this reality. We call on the nation's universities and academic circles in general to make your voices heard forcefully.

From this moment on there are no longer any excuses regarding "contradictory reports," or "unconfirmed rumors," or lack of "hard facts."

APPENDICES

1. Results of the systematic web search

Search Strategy

Search Engine: Google

Number of key words: 9

Number of combinations: 10

Language: Spanish and English

Results per search: It depended on the word, but in all cases at least the first results were examined.

Strategy: Three filters were used for selecting news, videos, and images, and scientific and opinion articles that constituted the results of the search. The first one was limited to an examination of only those links in which at least one of the key words appeared in the title or Google's summary. The second involved reading the summary of the contents accessed by means of the selected links, if that summary provided evidence of an event related to Yapacana National Park or the situation of violence and problems at mines in the state of Amazonas. Finally, we selected the sources where one could identify images, videos, statements or evidence of verifiable mining activity, inside of Yapacana National Park as well as in its vicinity.

Products in independent files (or included in this Appendix, except for (f) below):

- (a) Spreadsheet specifying the results of each search.
- (b) Word document listing the links for each word which were then passed on to filter 2 and 3, in separate documents.
- (c) Files in PDF format that may consist of technical reports, scientific publications or a converted web page with valuable information that needs to be examined carefully.
- (d) Images in jpg, png or pdf format depending on formats available for downloading.
- (e) Videos in mp4 format downloaded from YouTube, and were part of the results of each search.
- (f) Report synthesizing information derived from the different products.

Results

Context

- There is a thesis that justifies the invasion of natural areas, especially after 1992, in Yapacana National Park, State of Amazonas, partially invaded by miners coming from Venezuela and Colombia. The situation repeats itself in Canaima National Park and thus upper Caroní River basin, with miners arriving from Brazil and Venezuela; in the Perijá

Sierra, State of Zulia, with the pressure to migrate being promoted by the government-owned Corporación de Desarrollo del Zula (Corpozulia), the Ministry of Mines and the coca and marihuana growers, linked to drug trafficking, not to mention activities by the guerillas and paramilitaries from Colombia. Frontera_Ambiente_DS.pdf

- Background and understanding of the current realm of exploitation. "...All of the above allows one to affirm that under the auspices of the Constitution of 1999, before 2014, but most of all starting from that date on, when there is a change of president following the death of Hugo Chávez, the statist tendency of closing off the private sector and disallowing the rights to property, free enterprise and competition in the matter of natural resources is not only being continued, but is being further reinforced, creating more extractive institutions and mechanisms, as with some that have been mentioned that are then added to those that already existed..." Aprovechamiento_ZDEN-AMO.pdf
- Analysis of problems connected with mining activities in the states of Bolívar and Amazonas: <https://coalicionregional.net/el-crecimiento-del-arco-minero-de-venezuela-aniquila-a-los-pueblos-indigenas/>
- The Mining Arc brings displacement and death to the indigenous peoples <http://www.diarioeltiempo.com.ve/noticias/arco-minero-provoca-desplazamiento-y-muerte-de-los-pueblos-indigenas>
- Situation in the area <http://www.voltairenet.org/article126705.html>
- "The 'signature' that now enables corporations from 'more developed' nations to further obtain, at liquidation sale prices, the 'right' to liquidate the habitats and ecosystems that make up the national parks starting at the lower Orinoco, that is to say, Aguarico-Guarquito, Cinaruco-Capanaparo, Cerro Yapacana, Jaua-Sarisariñama, Duida Marihuaca, Serraña de la Nablina, as well as the country's largest, Parima-Tapirapeco, and course, also Canaima, which, because it follows a different course, becomes part of the 'top sirloin' that certifies us as a 'grand producer' of gold, all of which constitutes the most criminal action that Maduro could have accomplished in exchange for a handful of coins belonging to the empire." <https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a223605.html>
- "Even though, for the last 25 years, there has been an uncontrollable chaos in Guayana's mining area, for the past 18 years this regime has implemented, through the Bolivarian National Armed Force, several plans to eradicate illegal mining operations in those territories: Piar Plan in 2003, which then became Mission Piar in 2005; Mining Reconversion Plan in 2006; Caura Plan in 2010; the Presidential Commission for the Protection of the Development and Comprehensive Promotion of Mining Activity in the Guayana Region, created in 2014 on the occasion of the creation of the Mining Arc. Just a short time ago police and military units killed 21 miners in El Manteco and in Tumeremo; in 2016 another 17 miners were killed in Tumeremo and these events are always identified as being massacres executed by the military or armed groups, who have done little to serve the plans. "<http://www.noticierodigital.com/2017/09/miguel-mendez-rodulfo-la-mineria-y-los-inmensos-danos-ambientales/>
- "La Paragua and El Caura, in the state of Bolívar, as well as distant geographical areas in the state of Amazonas, including Yapacana National Park, present another critical factor that has very serious consequences, namely, the use of mercury (Hg), commonly known as quicksilver. Mercury contamination is associated with small to medium scale gold mining operations. The prolonged use of mercury in the state of Bolívar over many decades has brought about its accumulation throughout the entire mining territory. In this respect, today it is possible to detect Hg concentrations in the atmosphere, bodies

- of water, sediments, soils, aquatic animals, vegetation, and in the blood, urine and hair samples taken from people living in this sphere of influence." AmbienteSano.pdf
- Through the development of an SIG, 189 illegal mines and 25 clandestine landing strips were identified in Venezuela's Guayana region. It is estimated that 6.19% of the ABRAE territory is affected by mining activities, as well as 900 km² in four National Parks. Tesis_MineralIllegalMonitoreo. pdf

Regulatory and Reclamation Actions

Among salient actions by governmental agencies one finds: Yapacana Plan 2004-2005; National Strategic Plan for the Defense, Development and Consolidation of the South; "Mission Piar" (2005) and the policy for "Reconversion of Mining Operations" (2006); Operation "Blue Gold" in 2010; Caura Plan beginning in 2010. The Presidential Commission for the Protection, Development and Comprehensive Promotion of Legal Mining Operations in the Guayana Region.

ObservatorioEcoPolitica_Atabapo.pdf

2009

- "The Brigadier General Emilio Arévalo Cedeño School of Special Jungle Operations of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (ESCOESFANB) was founded on 28 December 2009 on the initiative of Henry de Jesús Rangel Silva, at the time Major General and Chief of the Integral Defense for the Strategic Region of Guayana. The initiative for the creation of this school had been motivated by the proliferation of illegal mining activities in Yapacana National Park, in Atabapo Municipality, state of Amazonas, where Venezuelans and foreigners had been extracting gold ore. These actions have been destroying the soil's plant cover and the vegetation, and contaminating the waters, thus causing serious deterioration of the planet's plant life. From the moment this became apparent, and with a great sense of responsibility, dedication and sacrifice, under the guidelines and support from the Bolivarian Navy and the Integral Defense for the Strategic Region of Guayana, various objectives and goals were established in a methodical way, propelling and promoting all the resources in a rapid and prioritized manner aimed at being able to consolidate this mission that has been entrusted by the Supreme Leader of the Bolivarian Revolution."

<https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n147866.html>

2012

- "José Alejandro Zambrano, the Ministry of the Environment's director for the entity, reported that the reforestation insists of planting 8,000 plants and dropping 400,000 seeds from an MI-17 helicopter within a perimeter of 17 hectares onto the hillsides of Cerro Yapacana, where the ecosystem has been degraded by the illegal extraction of gold ore. <http://noticias.masverdedigital.com/venezuela-inician-plan-de-reforestacion-del-parque-nacional-yapacana-en-el-edo-amazonas/>

2014

- "The Public Ministry resolved to prohibit the extraction of high demand minerals such as gold, iron, diamonds, bauxite and coltan from the national parks of the sector such as Duida-Marawaka, Yapacana, Parima-Taparipecó, La Neblina, El Siapa, Cerro Arcamoni and the Alto Orinoco Biosphere Reserve, among others. Likewise, soldiers of the Bolivarian National Guard, the Army, the Navy and River Surveillance Detachment No.

914 were assigned the task of dismantling mining camps and eliminating any elements that might cause damage to the environment, while exercising caution in handling hazardous materials such as mercury." <http://www.2001.com.ve/en-la-calle/acuerdan-prohibicion-de-mineria-ilegal-en-amazonas.html>

- "The Ministry of the Environment and the GNG planted and dispersed 10,000 *avíos* (pelleted seeds or seeds packed in fertilized humus) inside Yapacana National Park at Mina Nueva and Mina Piedra. These were planted for the purpose of providing protection. 5,000 holes were dug and the plants were placed in parcels totaling 6 hectares that were reforested with 1,000 acacias, 1,500 gamhar trees, 2,000 cashew fruit trees and 500 yagrumo trees, all of which was facilitated by the Carnagua institutional nursery of the Ministry of the Environment."
- <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/min-ambiente-y-gnb-realizaron-actividades-conservacionistas-amazonas/>

2018

- Three Social Service Facilities and a Miners' Network: "Minister Cano explained that this facility will offer comprehensive attention to more than 960 families in the Mining Arc, consisting of 5,000 people, through a permanent social program, with justice and total sovereignty. Meanwhile, Alexander "Mimou" Vargas, representative from the Presidential Commission for the Peace and Life Movement, expressed his satisfaction for the networking that had resulted at the Hoja de Lata II community, a zone that will serve as a pilot plan for building peace and welfare in the Orinoco Mining Arc. Today we have established the first Miners' Network of the Peace and Life Movement in the Orinoco Mining Arc. We are fulfilling President Nicolás Maduro's guidelines for developing positive and peaceful community life in the mining territories. We must see to it that gold is not more important than human beings, youths, women, and the Earth. The state of Bolívar deserves this very important effort and we must defend miners and mining operations everywhere."

<http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/economia/trabajadores-de-la-pequena-mineria-suscribieron-55-alianzas-de-propiedad-social-con-el-gobierno/>

- As part of the agreements, we expect to approve documents for 488 joint ventures for producing gold, and another 36 for diamond production. "Venezuela is certifying that this will be second gold deposit in the world. Venezuela is a gold producing power in the world, and that is why there have been illegal attempts to go after Venezuela's gold," he emphasized. <https://www.panorama.com.ve/politicayeconomia/Gobierno-firma-mas-de-185-contratos-de-alianzas-con-la-mineria-artesanal-20181109-0105.html>

Health

- Area with illegal artisanal gold mining activity. During the years 1990-1992 a study was conducted where it was determined that the concentration in the water was 0.002 ppm; while the sediment showed values as high as 0.56 ppm, resulting from mining activities. Even though the extraction area near Cerro Yapacana has increased, there have been no current determinations made concerning the release of Hg in that area. MercurioProceedings2004.pdf
- "Statistics from the Office of Environmental Health at Puerto Ayacucho indicate that, for the year 2016, 29,100 cases [of malaria] were recorded in the state of Amazonas, 20 percent more than in 2015. The effects of this epidemic, affects four municipalities in

the state of Amazonas (Atures, Manapiare, Autana and Atabapo) reach as far as Amanaven and Puerto Inírida, two towns in Colombia. The effect of this illegal mining activity, in addition to the malaria, has been the evident environmental destruction in areas such as Yapacana National Park and the Orinoco, Atabapo, Guainía, Sipapo-Guayapo, Upper Cuao, Ocamo, Manapiare-Ventuari, Parucito-Majagua, Parú, Asita and Siapa rivers." <http://revistasic.gumilla.org/2017/malaria-y-mineria-en-amazonas/>

The Guerrillas

2012

- "Julián controls everything that enters, what's produced, and what leaves the illegal gold mines that are devouring the heart of Yapacana National Park." In 2012 scouting activity in Venezuela by the Acacio Medina [a guerrilla unit] right away reached the Casiquiare River, a waterway that is 326 kilometers in length and is a tributary of the Orinoco River. During its forward advancement, the Acacio Medina unit went up the Atabapo River and gained control of the gold-bearing deposits that lie beneath the ground at Yapacana National Park. The objectives of the Acacio Medina Front were financial and at that time it had already encroached upon gold and coltan mines in the neighboring municipality of Guainía in Colombia, where mining operations have been underway for about five years."

<https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/disidencia-de-la-guerrilla-colombiana-peneta-el-amazonas-venezolano/>

2013

- The military leadership of the REDI-ZODI of Guayana is aware that the FARC has advanced as far the Casiquiare, Yapacana National Park and the Sipapo and Autana river basins, all the way to the outskirts of Puerto Ayacucho."
- <https://www.reportero24.com/2013/09/20/sebastiana-barraez-militares-detectan-en-amazonas-a-las-farc-armada-y-uniformada/>

2017

- Liborio Guaruya, former governor of the state of Amazonas, denounced that, in the state of Amazonas, there are more than 4,000 guerrilla soldiers from Colombia, truly an occupation army that wields control over the mining operation while Venezuela's armed forces fail to fulfill their role in safeguarding the country's sovereignty. In 2017 a commission of the National Assembly concluded that dismantling the Ministry of the Environment, created in 1997 and the first in Latin America, and replacing it with Ministry of Ecosocialism and Water "has reduced its environmental planning and technical capabilities." http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/actos/_informe-de-la-comision-mixta-de-creacion-de-la-zona-de-desarrollo-estrategico-nacional-arco-minero-del-orinoco y <http://cronica.uno/an-la-fuerza-armada-tolera-presencia-paramilitares-mafias-arco-minero/>

2018

- "A map showing the presence of irregular armed groups, prepared by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), outlines the presence of the ELN in the state of Amazonas, starting at Puerto Páez, in Pedro Camejo Municipality, in the state of Apure, and reaching as far as San Fernando de Atabapo, in Atabapo Municipality. Meanwhile, on the other hand, dissident groups from the FARC have deployed in the southern part

of the state of Amazonas, in the vicinity of Yapacana National Park, southwest of the confluence of the Ventuari and Orinoco rivers, and also to the north a few kilometers from Puerto Ayacucho, the state capital. The IFJ emphasizes that the motives of these dissidents are basically economical. By settling into the Orinoco Mining Arc they seek to have access to, and control over the coltan, gold and diamond deposits found in this area. <https://dolartoday.com/el-mayor-traidor-de-la-patria-maduro-entrego-concesion-minera-la-guerrilla-colombiana/>

- "In recent years, there have been reports of movements by the ELN and dissidents from the FARC (Frente 16 and Frente Acacio Medina) toward areas of high strategic importance. The reasons are economical. The region consists of the Colombian departments of Guainía, Vichada and Arauca, and the Venezuelan states of Apure, Bolívar and Amazonas, located in the Llanos (the plains) and Guayana regions of Venezuela. <http://www.ideaspaz.org/media/website/infografia-movimientos-disidencias-eln.pdf>
- "SEMANA revealed that this area is an economic sconce held by 'John 40', who inherited his power from 'Negro Acacio'. Now, as the new head of the dissident groups, he operates together with dozens of men in the area between [the Colombian department of] Guainía and Venezuela, and has reactivated the [coca] fields as well as the exportation routes. It is said that, in the neighboring country [of Venezuela], where he is hiding, he has a cocaine storage facility, with clandestine landing strips in the Yapacana mountain area, which connects to Colombia by way of the Orinoco. Apparently, a camp has also been set up there for training new recruits. His role does not stop there. 'John 40' now controls gold and coltan deposits and is also shipping drugs, not just to Venezuela, but also to Brazil. <https://rimixradio.com/la-guerra-por-la-frontera-otra-amenaza-a-los-migrantes-venezolanos/>
- "A study by the International Federation of Journalists (IJF) states: "Led by 'Julián Chollo', this group, together with an undetermined number of Colombians and Venezuelans, not only maintain control over mining areas consisting of gold and coltan deposits (including tungsten, according to some interviewees), but it has also gained strength in Venezuela, taking control over the gold deposits at Yapacana [National] Park, where it is suspected that 'John 40' may be present." <http://www.correodelcaroni.com/index.php/ciudad/ciudad-bolivar/305-eln-explora-suelo-venezolano-desde-hace-cinco-anos-y-se-expande-para-controlar-minas-y-pasos-fronterizos/>
- Government account concerning the presence of guerillas in the state of Amazonas: <http://www.eluniversal.com/politica/25276/ataque-en-amazonas-forma-parte-del-plan-de-colombia> "It's the product of the internal war that Colombia is experiencing, which the (Colombian) state has not been able to resolve in more than 60 years,' stated [Vladimir Padrino López, Vice President for Political Sovereignty, Security and Peace], who is also Defense Minister. He argued that despite attempts by Venezuelan security authorities, they have not been able to establish communications with their Colombian counterparts. "They have refused to have any talks about these things we have in common," countered Padrino López. He explained that the attack had been in retaliation for the arrest of nine individuals in Barrio Escondido, in the state of Amazonas. They had been carrying military weapons and grenades." <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/padrino-lopez-ataque-amazonas-colombia-guerra-interna-20181105-0020.html> <http://www.eluniversal.com/sucesos/25061/persiste-militarizacion-en-amazonas-tras-ataque-de-grupo-irregular-colombiano>

<https://primicia.com.ve/lider-del-eln-capturado-en-amazonas-fue-enviado-a-ramo-verde/> "Following Padrino López's statements, Colombia's foreign office issued a communiqué confirming that Luis Felipe Ortega Bernal is a known ringleader of the National Liberation Army, whose criminal record has warranted the issuance of an Interpol Blue Notice, for multiple crimes committed in our country.' It likewise expressed that 'it will be attentive in facilitating all the collaboration that may be required, through judicial channels of cooperation, to ensure punishment for those responsible for such an unfortunate act, with the understanding that the fight against terrorism is an obligation of all States." <https://prodavinci.com/vladimir-padrino-ataque-en-amazonas-dejo-3-guardias-nacionales-muertos-y-10-heridos/>

- Unofficial report concerning the presence of guerrillas in the state of Amazonas: "[National Assemblyman] Grazia added that the ELN is also in charge of 'looking after the **coltan mines** belonging to *Nicolacito* (President Nicolás Maduro's son) in **Parguaza** and of murdering Venezuelan soldiers carrying **national identification cards** and **Fatherland Cards.**" <http://versionfinal.com.ve/politica-dinero/de-grazia-a-maduro-explicale-a-venezuela-que-hace-el-eln-en-amazonas-y-bolivar/> "The ELN is training indigenous people in the state of Amazonas to carry out attacks. This may turn into a civil war, because the military are under orders to protect the guerrilla forces," stated [National Assemblyman] Guzamana during an interview with journalist Ana Rodríguez Brazón of VPI. The indigenous representative from the state of Amazonas explained that the individuals that make up the Colombian irregular group are married to indigenous women in Venezuela and carry Father Cards, an instrument created by the government." <http://www.ntn24america.com/america-latina/venezuela/diputado-guzamana-el-eln-entrena-los-indigenas-para-que-realicen-los>

Arrests and Evictions

2005

- "The Representative from the Public Ministry states there is continued development of intensive mining activity in the State, specifically in the area of Cerro Avispa, the Cerro Aracamoni Natural Monument, Yapacana National Park, Duida Marahuaca National Park, Manapiare and other areas, which among others, make up a total of 39 mining centers. For this reason, a petition was presented to the Prosecutor, pursuant to what is established in Article 24 of the Environmental Penal Law, in its Section 5, to eliminate obstacles and apparatuses that may alter the looks or the rational use of water resources lake, marine and coastal environments, or areas under special administrative regulation; the R.F. maintains that despite the precautionary measures that the Court approved and were officially notified to the appropriate authorities, the problem has shifted from one place to another, thus aggravating the situation and endangering the indigenous people who are in the vicinity of the mining areas, as this is their habitat." <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/fiscalia-septima-ministerio-publico-287210807>

2009

- "'In Yapacana [National] Park the Bolivarian Armed Force is conducting operations to fight against illegal mining operations, an anomaly that is being brought about in this area by miners from Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and other countries, and has brought about destruction at this natural monument, including some that may be irreversible from an environmental point of view,' stated [Venezuelan Vice President Ramón] Carrizález. The Venezuelan high official was quick to deny statements made by

Colombian Defense Minister Gabriel Silva, who deemed Venezuela's sovereign decision as a violation of labor rights. He maintained that Colombia's Defense Ministry is on the warpath and has spoken about Venezuela's decision in terms of political purposes, attempting to accuse the Venezuelan Government of having evicted 'humble workers' from the state of Amazonas. 'Things are not what the Colombian government tries to make them look when it speaks of a mine being shut down and a whole lot of humble workers are being left unemployed, because mining operations are prohibited in the state of Amazonas. They are using these people for political ends, as they are accustomed to doing with people in need,' stated Carrizález in his statements over TeleSur." <https://www.ocmal.org/venezuela-ejercicio-soberania-al-expulsar-a-mineros-ilegales-colombianos-y-brasilenos/> ; <https://informe21.com/revela-cinismo/chavez-afirma-caso-los-mineros-ilegales-expulsados-revela-cinismo-colombia>

2012

- "The GNB arrested 3 individuals involved in illegal mining and destroyed four illegal mining camps located in the area of Mina Moyo, Yapacana National Park and Atabapo Municipality. They had in their possession all the **necessary tools for extracting gold**. Four machines, or motorized **dredging pumps**, and **80 meters of 4 inch hose**, as well as **8 miners' sieves** were seized from the arrest individuals."
- <http://www.noticias24.com/venezuela/noticia/135267/la-gnb-detuvo-a-tres-sujetos-que-ejercian-la-mineria-ilegal-en-el-parque-nacional-yapacana/>;
- <https://diariolavoz.net/2012/11/12/gnb-destruyo-cuatro-campamentos-mineros-ilegales-en-amazonas/>
- "The GNB arrested 4 individuals involved in illegal mining operations in the area of Mina Fibra of Yapacana National Park. One firearm, one dredging machine and some tools used in the clandestine operation were seized from the arrested individuals, ages 25, 28, 29 and 33." <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/detienen-mineros-ilegales-parque-nacional-yapacana-amazonas/> "They had in their possession one 16mm caliber shotgun, 5 unused cartridges, one electronic scale and a wooden bongo (long canoe for navigating shallow waterways). Furthermore, near Cerro Yapacana, in the Caño Cotúa sector, Jairo Pérez, of Colombian nationality and undocumented, was arrested. During the military operation, five improvised mining camps, two machines used for dredging and 80 meters of 4 inch hose, used for extracting the gold-bearing matter, were destroyed. Also, 200 kilograms of basic foodstuff were seized."
- <http://www.noticiasdiarias.informe25.com/2012/06/desmantelan-bandas-dedicadas-actividad.html>
- "Twenty individuals connected to illegal mining in Yapacana National Park, located in Atabapo Municipality in the state of Amazonas, were arrested by the GNB and turned over to the Public Ministry. At the Mendejaque mine, where the arrested individuals had been staying, five portable radios, one shotgun, one solar panel, four wooden watercraft, four outboard motors and approximately one ton of food were seized. Also seized were 60 cases of liquor and 40 of soft drinks, brought in from Colombia. Also, at five mining camps, 10 shacks, two five horsepower mining dredges and one electric generator were destroyed. Brigadier General José Pinto Gutiérrez explained that the capture of the gang had resulted from denunciations by indigenous communities, organized into community councils. These communities meet weekly with the military in order to coordinate security in their territory."

<http://www.noticias24.com/venezuela/noticia/104410/guardia-nacional-desmantelo-banda-integrada-por-6-venezolanos-y-14-colombianos-por-mineria-ilegal-en-amazonas/>

2013

- "Action by the Public Ministry led to the arrest of 12 Colombians and 8 Venezuelans, all of whom were apprehended last July 17th, allegedly for the illegal occupation of nature areas in the vicinity of Yapacana National Park, in the Caño Moyo Mine area of the state of Amazonas. According to the investigation, on the aforementioned date, Bolivarian National Army soldiers were conducting aerial reconnaissance when they noticed devastated flora and fauna, eroded soil and contaminated waterways in the Caño Moyo sector, which led them to believe that there were illegal mining operations underway." <https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n233619.html> ; <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/privan-libertad-a-20-personas-por-ocupacion-illicita-areas-naturales-amazonas-2/>

2017

- REDI Guayana arrived at the mine at Cerro Yapacana National Park, in Atabapo Municipality of the state of Amazonas. The military troops assumed control of the mine, where they seized several machines used for illegal mining, structures used in hunting for gold, boots, picks, shovels, pipes, among other things. The military troops burned all the structures set up by the *garimpeiros* [Brazilian artisan miners], also pipes and hoses used for extracting gold. In the images one can appreciate the destruction of nature that has resulted from the illegal mining activity that is taking place in our Amazonian territory. <http://wakanoticias.com/actualidad/redi-guayana-toma-control-de-la-mina-del-parque-nacional-cerro-yapacana>
- [In Colombia], a report from the Foreign Ministry to the Congress mentions 433 cases of Colombians being repatriated from the YNP mines.
ColombianosRepatriados_Yapacana.pdf

Cases pertaining to mining activity / Evidence of mining activity

1987

- "The mining camp consisted of 104 individuals, most of them indigenous from the Piaroa, Guajibo and Curripaco peoples, as well as some *criollos* [Spanish-speaking Venezuelans of Hispanic heritage] and foreigners. The destruction of the micro-basin was evident, and on the savannahs, during an over flight, a clandestine airport was observed, where light aircraft bring in gold buyers who pay the miners Bs 150 (US\$ 10) per gram." (13 to 17 March 1987, García). ReporteEspecialPNYapacana_ParkWatch.pdf

1988

- Mina Nueva (south), Caño Rita, Caño San Andrés, Guedenjake (west), Platanillal (north), Cocina (northeast). The surface area of each camp varies between 0.5 and 2.0 ha. The procedure for extraction begins with felling the trees and moving rocks in order to remove the underlying sandy layer that contains the ore. When the miners cannot remove the rocks they dig caves underneath them. Later the ore is transported for washing, sorting by use of a sieve, and then the watery mix further separated by

swirling by use of a miner's pan. Mercury is used at Mina Nueva.

ReporteEspecialPNYapacana_ParkWatch.pdf

- *Criollo* and foreign (Colombian and Brazilian) conduct mining operations using tools and mechanical devices such as motorized water pumps, cranes and electrical generators, and in some cases even mercury is used. The gold is commercialized by way of barter or through purchase-sale transactions: The bartering takes place at San Fernando de Atabapo, where domestic appliances are exchanged for gold, while purchase-sale transactions are conducted at Puerto Ayacucho, San Fernando de Atabapo and other places, where the price of gold varies between Bs 100 and 250 (US\$ 7 and 17) per gram. ReporteEspecialPNYapacana_ParkWatch.pdf

1989

- In the state of Amazonas, this activity involves approximately 1,500 individuals, 50% of whom are indigenous (Guajibo, Piaroa, Curripaco), 25% are *criollos* and 25% are foreigners (Colombian, Dominican and others). Beginning in 1983 the activity began to manifest itself in an aggressive manner, but still incipient and controllable.

ReporteEspecialPNYapacana_ParkWatch.pdf

1995

- On the hillsides of Cerro Yapacana: Mina Platanillal, La Cocina, Caño Rita, Caño Bocón, Caño Jabón and Mina Nueva. In savannah areas with a predominance of grasses, bushes and woodlands not susceptible to flooding: Maraya, Piedras Blancas, Moyo and other points having no known names. In other areas: Yagua and Caño Cotúa. The camps are located two kilometers from the extraction area, thus reducing the chances of being surprised during the night by the authorities.

ReporteEspecialPNYapacana_ParkWatch.pdf

1998

- It is reported that one of the main centers of mining activity continues to be located in the Yapacana-Maraya area. ReporteEspecialPNYapacana_ParkWatch.pdf

2003

- In 2003 there were approximately thirty gold extraction dredges in operation in Yapacana, plus another sixteen in Caño Maraya, one of the principal tributaries of the Orinoco at Yapacana. That year, Ramón Iribertegui, with fast and simple calculation, confirmed the extra official data (because the official stance is that the mine at Yapacana does not exist, it is not possible to obtain official data about gold mining) concerning four tons being extracted monthly, and stated that even this figure was less than the real amount, which probably approximated five and a half tons of gold monthly (Iribertegui, 2004). Vutoba_Confluenze_Migrantesdesterradosintrusos.pdf
- "All of this area is "liberated territory" held by the FARC. The guerrillas support the *garimpeiros* that come in from Brazil to work at the clandestine gold mine at Yapacana, a very shady region. On 20 October, on board the Yatujé, we arrived at a wayside stop called San Antonio, a place without any women, inhabited only by men, all mestizos: *garimpeiros*, evidently looking for gold at Cerro Yapacana." <https://www.proceso.com.mx/192852/el-los-confines-del-orinoco>
- "The deposit area of Cerro Yapacana in Caño Yagua, and Caño Maraya represents deposits of Au associated with a small mountain lying in a base of crystalline rock (granites) of Ayacucho province. The small mountains consist of quartzite-

metasediment but are not considered Roraima formation."

<https://thediggings.com/mines/usgs10067056>

- "The illegal mining activity in region extends even into Yapacana National Park. This is demonstrated by the presence of mercury in the tissues of some of the species that are an important part of the regional diet. In nine out of the 17 species examined, we found concentrations higher than 0.5 µg/g, which is the maximum allowed by the World Health Organization. There are at least three known illegal mines in the region, among which Caño Maraya and Caño Yagua stand out because of their impact."
Peces_Ventuari_Venezuela.pdf

2005

- "According to Venezuelan authorities, the three Indians were arrested as they accompanied ten gold prospectors (nine Brazilians and one Colombian) during a canoe trip along the Orinoco River. The Brazilians were transporting about eight tons of food supplies and two tons of mining material, including mercury. They were arrested in the Yapacana National Park, located in the Venezuelan state of Amazonas, where clandestine mining is going on. In January 2005, there were also reports that guerrillas belonging to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were in the Park."
http://www.proyanomami.org.br/boletimMail/yanoBoletim/html/Bulletin_62.htm
- "...That on 02 FEB 05 that Office received official communication Nº 0525, issued by the 52nd Jungle Infantry Brigade under the command of Army General N.E.A.T., whereby he informs this R.F. that during aerial reconnaissance performed by that Garrison's command it became evident that there was mining activity present in Yapacana National Park, located in Atabapo Municipality of the State of Amazonas where there are locations that have been totally deforested."
<https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/fiscalia-septima-287038075>
- "Likewise, on 17 FEB 05, official communication Nº 001, dated 24 JAN 05, issued by the Dr. J.G.H. Hospital, which conveys a detailed medical report about the birth a female child of the Magugchiña (Yanomami) Community of the Upper Orinoco, who was born with congenital deformities, scaly skin, agenesis of the epidermis in several spots."
<https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/fiscalia-septima-287038075>
- "Furthermore, of the new cases known by that R.F., one can say that thirteen (13) cases have come forth with detainees from whom gold-bearing material and spare parts for dredges has been seized; consequently it has been fully demonstrated that no compliance is being given to the precautionary measures determined by the Court on 27 JAN 05, given that Brazilian and Colombian citizens have continued to enter the Territory for the purpose of illegal mining activity".
<https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/fiscalia-septima-287038075>
- "...That on 28 FEB 05 [R.F.] received official communication Nº CR9-CM-DO-0653, issued by Regional Command Nº 9 and signed by the Chief of Operations of the National Guard, Colonel (National Guard) R.S., by which he confirmed actions conducted in the Carida Community, dated after the decree of measures P. determined by this Court, where evidence was presented of the detention of eighty-one (81) individuals, fifty-five (55) of Colombian nationality and twenty-six (26) of Brazilian nationality, all of whom were detained at the village of Carida, and who are presumably involved in illegal mining activity in the area." <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/fiscalia-septima-287038075>

- "The prosecutor's office recommends giving official notice to the Delegated Ombudsman so that through his assistants he may regulate the number of motorized water pumps and hoses that may be used by the Indigenous Communities for obtaining water, by means of a census at these communities that are located in the vicinity of mining centers such as C. San Antonio del Orinoco and Macuruco, Manapiare and any other areas near Yapacana National Park, as well as those communities located near the Siapa River..." <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/fiscalia-septima-287038075>.
- Other national parks further south suffer from illegal mining, for instance in Yapacana National Park. There are many illegal gold and diamond miners from Colombia and squatters starting agriculture... Those areas are enormous, so it is difficult for the government to control these practices, which require boats and a helicopter. Since President Chávez issued the new decree 3110 in September 2004 on the forest reserve of Imataca, this region is under threat again as well. There is an effort to make illegal mining legal. The government doesn't want to stop this mining, because the social costs will be too high. It would be very difficult to turn the mining back.
<https://amigransa.blogia.com/2005/123104-venezuela-s-environment-under-stress.php>

2008

- "The ever greater presence of the *garimpeiros* also impelled changes in the methods used by foreign concession companies for extracting gold. Starting in the year 2008, these companies have had to leave the country forcefully as a result of changes in policy toward mining activity that the government called "renationalization." Researchers and activists have stated that these governmental changes created a "perfect storm" by which tens of thousands of artisanal miners from throughout Venezuela, Brazil and Guyana have brought about the environmental destruction resulting from the hydraulic erosion of the soil, deforestation and the indiscriminate or inappropriate use of mercury - used for isolating the gold from the sediments - together with mafias, guerrillas, corruption, prostitution, white slavery, regular slavery, child labor and tens of thousands of cases of malaria each year."
<https://es.mongabay.com/2016/01/mineria-de-oro-en-venezuela-una-tormenta-perfecta-de-mineria-ilegal-deforestacion-y-mafias/>

2009

- "In what was yesterday YNP, today millennial trees lie on the ground as if in a cemetery for plants. These were trees that had been of great service to humanity. While they were alive they produced that one asset we often take for granted yet is vital for the preservation of our planet, namely oxygen. The ecocide that is committed everyday at this Cemetery is attributable to the practice of illegal mining by Brazilians, Colombians and certain friends of the people, all of whom attempt indiscriminately against natures, all for a fistful of gold." <http://toparquia.blogspot.com/2009/09/colectivo-bravo-orinoco-denuncia-el.html>
- An interesting account by a traveller to Yapacana: "...but rather by the danger to life itself at Cerro Yapacana. Almost the entire area was dominated by heavily armed professional Colombian and Brazilian garimpeiros that owned most of the dredges and suction apparatus used to extract most of the gold-bearing material. Today there is talk in Venezuela of between 2,000 and 12,000 tons of probable gold reserves, which would mean 10% of the world stock, with a current market value of some 140 billion dollars.

The private surveillance system at Cerro Yapacana has sophisticated radio transmitters and satellite telephones that carry information with lightning speed. It gives them time to bury machines and food supplies. The only thing they cannot hide is the ecocide. The National Guard at Atabapo captured three of the more important capos that control Yapacana. Perhaps the power of money will keep the prosecutors and judges from putting them behind bars. The miners trade in gold and buy out consciences and public officials..." <http://marakoa.blogspot.com/2009/>

2013

- "Two kilometers from the military post is the mouth of Caño Atacavi, where there are two guerrilla camps with at least 200 men. They have roads and trails that lead them to the Orinoco River, where the Cerro Yapacana mines are. <http://quintodia.net/en-marao-las-farc-tiene-7-campamentos/> At Yapacana gold extraction has had brutal effects on the environment, and mercury has contaminated the rivers. This business has at least three thousand garimpeiros made up of Brazilians and Colombians. The chiefs of this territory are the uniformed and armed guerrillas identified as belonging to the FARC, as detected by the Venezuelan military"
<http://quintodia.net/militares-detectan-en-amazonas-a-las-farc-armada-y-uniformada/>
- "During this past year (2013-2014) an increase in illegal mining activity has been observed along the course of the Atabapo River, where this activity uses vessels equipped with suction machinery brought over from Colombia, and used to dredge the rivers to extract gold in international waters. In turn, throughout the entire Yapacana National Park area, and the lower Ventuari River, there is continued activity related to the illegal extraction of gold and other minerals, mostly involving foreign citizens from Colombia and Brazil." <https://gestion-ambiental-biblioteca.blogspot.com/2014/04/ecosocialismo.html>
- The gold is sold at commercial establishments known as *compra-ventas* [buy-and-sell], legally incorporated at Inírida. Some of them certify the payment of royalties. Nonetheless, there is an absence of information that prevents the authorities from challenging merchants concerning production figures. This void also gives ample room for laundering assets, a reality that has been permanently reiterated by the authorities, and is one of the reasons that is put forth for combatting illegal mining activities. Another aspect that needs to be addressed is the sale of gold that has been extracted in Venezuela (at open pit mines inside or near Yapacana National Park) at the *compra-ventas* of Inírida, Colombia (based on interview of a merchant at Amanavén, Vichada, Colombia in 2013). Finally the gold that is melted down at Inírida is commercialized in the capital city of Bogotá, and more so in Medellín. MineríaColtan_COL-VEN.pdf

2014

- (Amazonas, 04 APR 2016, COIAM-ORPIA). The organizations state in their report that: "We are profoundly concerned about the increase in ILLEGAL MINING ACTIVITY (gold mining) in several areas of the State of Amazonas, which affects numerous indigenous towns and communities in the region. During these past years (2014 - 2015 - 2016) we have observed an increase in mining activity along the course of numerous rivers and areas with tall forests, including the use of motorized water pumps and vessels equipped with suction machinery used to dredge the rivers to extract gold. The

organizations emphasize that the illegal mining activity in the entire State of Amazonas is accompanied by many illegalities such as domestic products, including fuels, being smuggled out of the country, prostitution, organized crime, the illegal entry into the country by foreign individuals, mostly from Colombia and Brazil, the presence of armed groups that generate violence and the trafficking in substances prohibited by law. All of these illegal activities, specifically illegal mining, are public realities that are widely known and broadcast by the communities and the news media."

<http://www.civilisac.org/alertas/organizaciones-indigenas-solicitan-al-gobierno-se-tomen-medidas-contra-la-mineria-ilegal> ; <http://lacrase.info/content/sobre-la-mineria-ilegal-en-el-municipio-atabapo/>

- According to a statement issued by COIAM in 2014, illegal mining is a growing concern in the Atabapo River basin, in the Yapacana National Park, and off the Ventuari River. Among the groups affected by this extraction is the Yanomami of southern Venezuela. Survival International reported that, "over 1,000 gold miners are now working illegally on Yanomami land, transmitting deadly diseases like malaria and polluting the rivers and forest with mercury." As a result Yanomami health is suffering and critical medical care is not reaching them. DerechosHumanos_venezuela_2016.pdf
 - At Yapacana, there are more than 2,000 miners, who, in addition to destroying the vegetation cover, are also consuming meat from wildlife they themselves hunt, or which they obtain from local organized hunters in exchange for gold. Then the mines run out (it appears this will happen before they are regulated), or when smuggling no longer makes any sense, we will have a State of Amazonas that has been ransacked, with serious environmental and social problems, and without any productive investment that would guarantee a healthy economy. The economic and social crisis will then become greater. Of course, with a mafia organization, and armed gangs, along with the presence of the main political parties and the security forces, both of which are more effective than the communal councils. The mining companies, those that have always been around, and those that have been newly organized by the new and corrupt rich, hope for and encourage this chaos of illegality in order to justify openly legal mining, where they will continue their illegal activities so as not to pay what is owed to the State. <https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a224138.html>
 - [Governor Liborio Guarulla stated]: "We denounce that more than Colombian and Venezuelan 24 rafts have dropped anchor in international waters and have not only contaminated the Atabapo River but have also contributed to poisoning the fish and have affected those who live along the riversides." "Cerro La Neblina and Cerro Yapacana have been destroyed along their edges. Cerro Yapacana may even collapse at any moment." He further added that "the lack of control by the FANB and the defunct Ministry of the Environment have allowed for the exploitation of municipalities such as Atabapo itself, Alto Orinoco, Manaiare and Río Negro."
- <http://www.noticias24.com/venezuela/noticia/255756/en-instantes-el-gobernador-de-amazonas-hablara-de-la-mineria-ilegal-en-la-region/>

2015

- The publication *Iglesia en Amazonas* (April 2015) presents a proposal to create a Legislators' Commission that would have them go to the illegal mining operations at Yapacana and neighboring areas in Atabapo Municipality for the purpose of preparing convincing documental materials that could be used as materials of instruction for the environmental education for the citizenry.

<https://issuu.com/revistaiglesiaenamazonas/docs/revistaiglesiaenamazonas144> The magazine's article is reproduced on this blog page:

<http://laguarura.info/2014/05/20/salvemos-el-atabapo>

- Account by a traveller to Yapacana: "The place is also ominous because of gold. Despite being in the centre of the Yapacana National Park it has one of the highest concentrations of illegal gold mining in Amazonas. There are even rumours of underground mines, and it is estimated that around 2000 illegal miners operate in the area. Miners live in and off the forest hunting wildlife in the park with modern firearms, and extracting their gold using mercury much of which ends up as methyl-mercury in the rivers and streams. We were not planning on entering the forest around Yapacana, but we had to get up river past the area."

<http://jonathanbarnaby.blogspot.com/2015/10/up-orinoco.html>

2017

- Nestor Villamizar denounces: "The Amazonians are living off illegal mining activities and there is internal complicity." He further warns: "the youth are losing their way." Specifically, he is telling us that "there is mining activity in Yapacana National Park and indigenous territory is being violated. **To listen to the radio program:** <http://puntodecorte.com/nestor-villamizar-mdi-amazonense-esta-viviendo-la-mineria-ilegal/>

Platforms of interest for alliances

- Environmental Justice Atlas: <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/pueblos-indigenas-arawaks-del-sur-afectados-por-mineria-ilegal-en-la-cuenca-del-rio-atabapo>
- Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina: https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/conflicto/view/931

Photographs

- JorgeGalindo_DesalojoYapacana
<http://www.noticias24.com/venezuela/noticia/135267/la-gnb-detuvo-a-tres-sujetos-que-ejercian-la-mineria-ilegal-en-el-parque-nacional-yapacana/>
- PNY_Mineria_1987: ReporteEspecialPNYapacana_ParkWatch
- BalsaDraga_Atabapo_Hernández-Mora.png
<http://www.ecopoliticavenezuela.org/georreferenciacion/56/>
- mineriazodi1_2017 – mineriazodi4_2017:
<http://wakanoticias.com/actualidad/redi-guayana-toma-control-de-la-mina-del-parque-nacional-cerro-yapacana>
- ElClarín_PNY1 - ElClarín_PNY4:
<http://elclarinweb.com/entretenimiento/turismo/naturaleza-sin-igual-en-el-parque-nacional-yapacana>
- Nafagot_PNY1 – 2: <https://nafagot.wordpress.com/2015/01/13/parque-nacional-cerro-yapacana/>
- 1Amazonas_Piaroa y 2Amazonas_Maracoa <http://www.portal-brasil.com/Venezuela/Estados/FOTOS/Amazonas/AMAZONAS%2019.htm>

PDF

- Informe técnico sobre situación del PN Yapacana:
ReporteEspecialPNYapacana_ParkWatch.PDF
- Mapa y descripción biológica del PNY: BirdLifeDataZone.pdf
- Indígenas arawaks del sur afectados por minería ilegal en la cuenca del río Atabapo: ObservatorioEcoPolitica_Atabapo.pdf
- Viaje al corazón de las tinieblas en Venezuela: informe de Observatorio de Derechos de Propiedad. Aprovechamiento_ZDEN-AMO.pdf
- ¿Cómo se mueven el ELN y las disidencias de las FARC en la Orinoquía colombiana y la Guayana venezolana?: infografia-movimientos-disidencias-eln.pdf
- Información geológica Mina Maraya: MinaMaraya_Yapacana.pdf
- Derecho a un ambiente sano, informe anual PROVEA 2013: AmbienteSano.pdf
- Fronteras, ambiente y desarrollo sustentable 2012: Frontera_Ambiente_DS.pdf
- Regional awareness-raising workshop on mercury pollution, UNEP 2004: MercurioProceedings2004.pdf
- COLTÁN Falsa bonanza, reestructuración territorial y movilización interétnica en el río Inírida, Guainía, Colombia 2014: MineriaColtan_COL-VEN.pdf
- Diseño y desarrollo de un SIG sobre minería ilegal en la Guayana Venezolana, 2016: Tesis_MineralIllegalMonitoreo.pdf
- Evidencia de contaminación por mercurio en ecosistemas de la Guayana Venezolana. Peces_Ventuari_Venezuela.pdf
- Migrantes, desterrados, intrusos. Navegando la frontera amazónica entre Venezuela y Colombia, 2017: Vutoba_Confluenze_Migrantesdesterradosintrusos.pdf
- Áreas calientes de deforestación en Venezuela: HotSpotDeforestacionVenezuela.pdf

Videos

- For an understanding of the guerrilla connections
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCRjIAwi2Ts>
- "Esteban Rodríguez of the Ye'kuana of the Upper Ventuari Organization (KUYUNU) states the purposes of this organization for the defense of the rights of the Ye'kuana People in Venezuela's Amazon region, in response to the encroachment by illegal mining activity and the armed groups that are now present in the ancestral territories of these original peoples."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6rkM8aMZUw>
- Las Claritas, in Sifontes Municipality, State of Bolívar, is perhaps the only town in Venezuela where there is prosperity, and every month hundreds of Venezuelans arrive there in search of employment. There is no shortage of cash or food, and in just one week, jobs pay the equivalent of more than three monthly minimum salaries. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTXQzh_ijIM
- As part of a project toward the degree with a specialization in Research and Development Project Management: "A proposal technical and social approach instrumentation at job sites in small mining activities in the Municipality of El Callao, State of Bolívar during the period 2017-2017. Case: Mining community, the

big test." The present video stands out as part of the research resources with statements by small miners and leaders from the area. Summary of the use of amalgamation sheets in gold production at the mills. El Callao. Venezuela.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTanorDGwrM>

- Malaria, hunger, precarious conditions, and a lack of basic services are some of the things that Venezuelan miners must endure in order to provide for their families with the gold they find. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4k55SfLQgM>
- Images of illegal mining camps set up in the Great Savanna, one of the most important forest reserves in Venezuela.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8EAf8sUlqM>
- Mining activity in Atabapo Municipality, State of Amazonas, Venezuela.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bgv3eXxwmw0>
- The Venezuelan National Guard shut down 357 camps occupied by illegal miners in the Caroní and Caura river basins, as part of an operation directed against this kind of activity in eastern Venezuela.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99huml8sqNo>

2. Methodological aspects of the analysis of satellite data

Selection and downloading of satellite images

For assembling this report we utilized high and very high spatial resolution satellite images that cover Yapacana National Park (YNP), taken from satellite platforms and sensors described in Table A:

Table A. Satellite images selected for detection and quantification of mining areas in Yapacana National Park.

Platform /Sensor	Orbit/Point	Date Acquired	Spatial Resolution (m)	Level of Correction
Landsat-7/ETM ⁺	003/57	05 Jan 2002	15 (fusion of panchromatic and optical bands)	Orthorectified
Landsat-7/ETM ⁺	003/57	27 Jan 2004		Orthorectified
Landsat-7/ETM ⁺	003/57	20 Apr 2007		Orthorectified
Landsat-7/ETM ⁺	003/57	11 Jan 2010		Orthorectified
Landsat-7/ETM ⁺	003/57	02 Dec 2012		Orthorectified
Landsat-8/OLI	003/57	02 Dec 2013		Orthorectified
Landsat-8/OLI	003/57	27 Sep 2014		Orthorectified
Landsat-8/OLI	003/57	03 Nov 2016		Orthorectified
Landsat-8/OLI	003/57	26 Feb 2018		Orthorectified
Landsat-8/OLI	003/57	25 Nov 2018		Orthorectified
Sentinel 2A	-	11 Mar 2018	10 (multispectral bands)	Orthorectified
World View-2	-	13 Sep 2015 and 28 Nov 2013		0.52 (multispectral bands) With no georeferencing

All satellite images were downloaded from free distribution platforms such as: Landsat-8/OLI (United States Geological Survey - USGS), available at <https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/>; Sentinel-2 (European Space Agency), available at <https://www.copernicus.eu/>; and World View-2 (Radiant Earth Foundation - Free Distribution Earth and Space Data for Positive Impacts), available at <https://www.radiant.earth/explore/>.

Processing satellite images

Landsat (7 and 8) and Sentinel-2 images were obtained from their distribution platform using a processing level that provides spatial resolutions of 30m and 15m for Landsat images, on the multispectral and panchromatic bands respectively; and of 10m for those taken from Sentinel. These images are geometrically orthorectified for both orbital products and radiometrically corrected by means of the terrestrial surface reflectivity calculation (SR) for all Sentinel bands and for the multispectral bands (1 to 7) for Landsat images. With respect to the World View-2 images we obtained products with 0.42m spatial resolution with no georeferencing, corrected atmospherically by utilizing the atmospheric compensation algorithm (AComp).

After obtaining the satellite images, we fused the panchromatic (15m) and multispectral (30m) bands for the Landsat-7 and 8 images in order to obtain products having greater spatial resolution (15m), thus maintaining the spectral resolution of the optical bands. We were thereby able to distinguish unequivocally the areas affected by mining activity, as well as their precise quantification; as well as correctly identifying infrastructure and associated services lending support to the mining activity, such as roads and landing strips.

Detection and analysis of the mining areas

The detection of mining areas inside YNP was accomplished, on first approach, by visual analysis of Landsat-7 and 8 images pertaining to each of the years selected for the period under study (2002-2018) (Table A). Later, the mining areas detected during the year 2018, all of which encompass the total surface area affected by mining activity up until the year 2018, were validated by means of visual interpretation of Sentinel 2-A satellite images and the visual verification (qualitative appraisal) of the World View-2 images.

An example of the validation technique employed in this report is presented in Figures A and B, where it is demonstrated that the identification and verification of the mining activity sites in YNP was conducted through the use of high and very high spatial resolution satellite images. In these images, we were able to observe the presence of mining activities, clearly identifiable in a visual manner by recognizing patterns of anthropic intervention peculiar to gold mining activities, where one can observe soil that is deprived of the vegetation cover so characteristic of YNP, and the presence of ponds having greenish-blue tonalities.

Finally, we performed a temporal analysis of the mining activity in YNP. For this we selected Lansat-7 and 8 images and Sentinel-2A images pertaining to the period under study (Table A). In each of the selected images we detected and quantified the mining activity, utilizing the QGIS application (version 2.18.5) as a spatial analysis tool, for the purpose of establishing the temporal variation and the rate of growth of the anthropic intervention, as well as for the periods of greatest intensity for extractive activity (Figure C).

Figure A. Identification and validation of mining areas utilizing high and very high spatial resolution images (Cerro Yapacana Sector). (a) Mining activity detected in high spatial resolution image (Sentinel 2); (b) 3D view of mining activity (Sentinel 2); (c) Mining activity validated by way of very high spatial resolution image (World View-2); and (d) Enlarged window of World View-2 image, where one can see the infrastructure and associated services in support of the mining activity, such as roadways and a heliport.

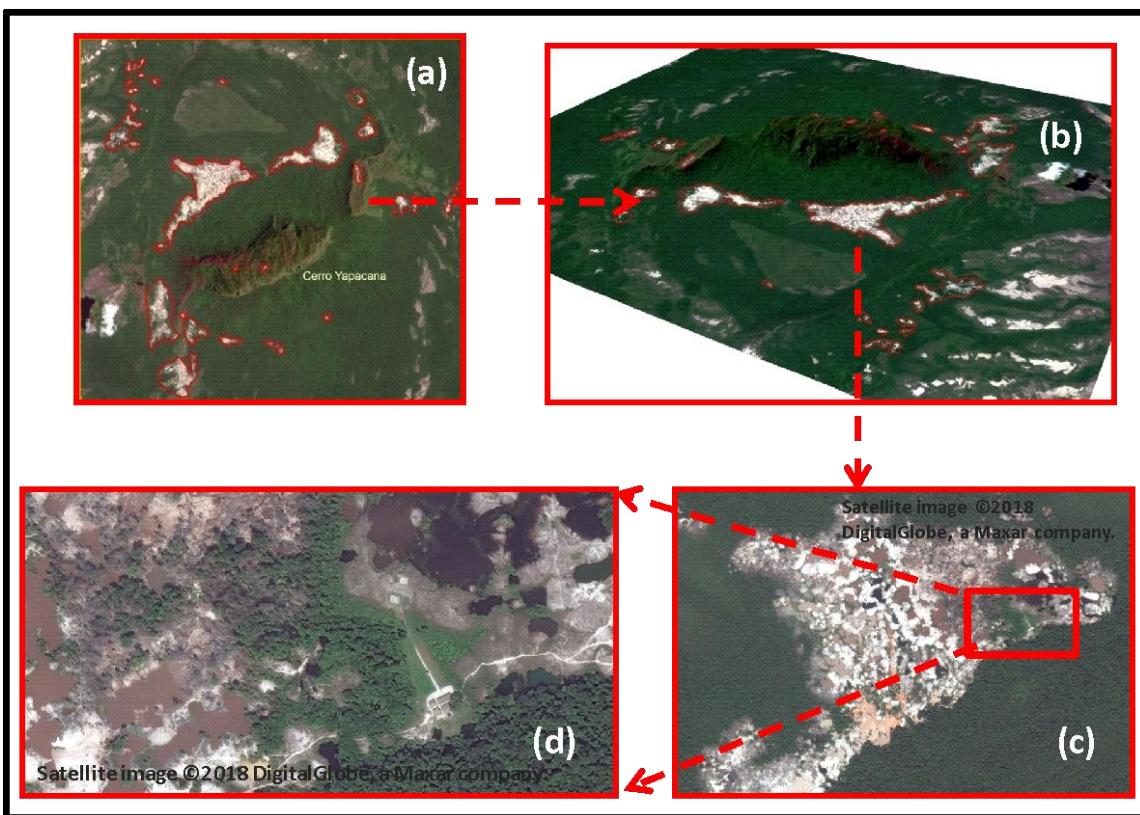


Figure B. Identification and validation of mining areas utilizing high and very high spatial resolution images (Cerro Moyo-Venturi Sector). (a) Mining activity detected in high spatial resolution image (Sentinel 2); 3D view of mining activity (Sentinel 2); (c) Mining activity validated by way of very high spatial resolution image (World View-2); and (d) Enlarged window of World View-2 image, where one can see infrastructure and associated services in support of the mining activity.

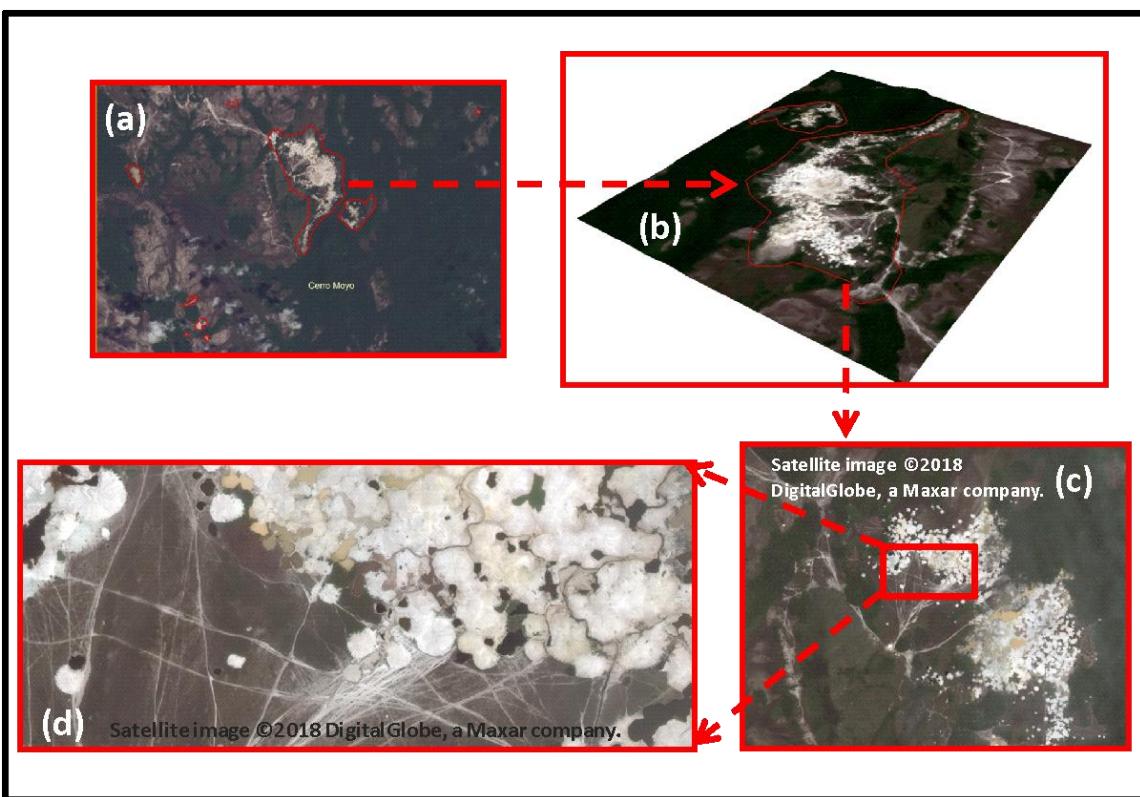
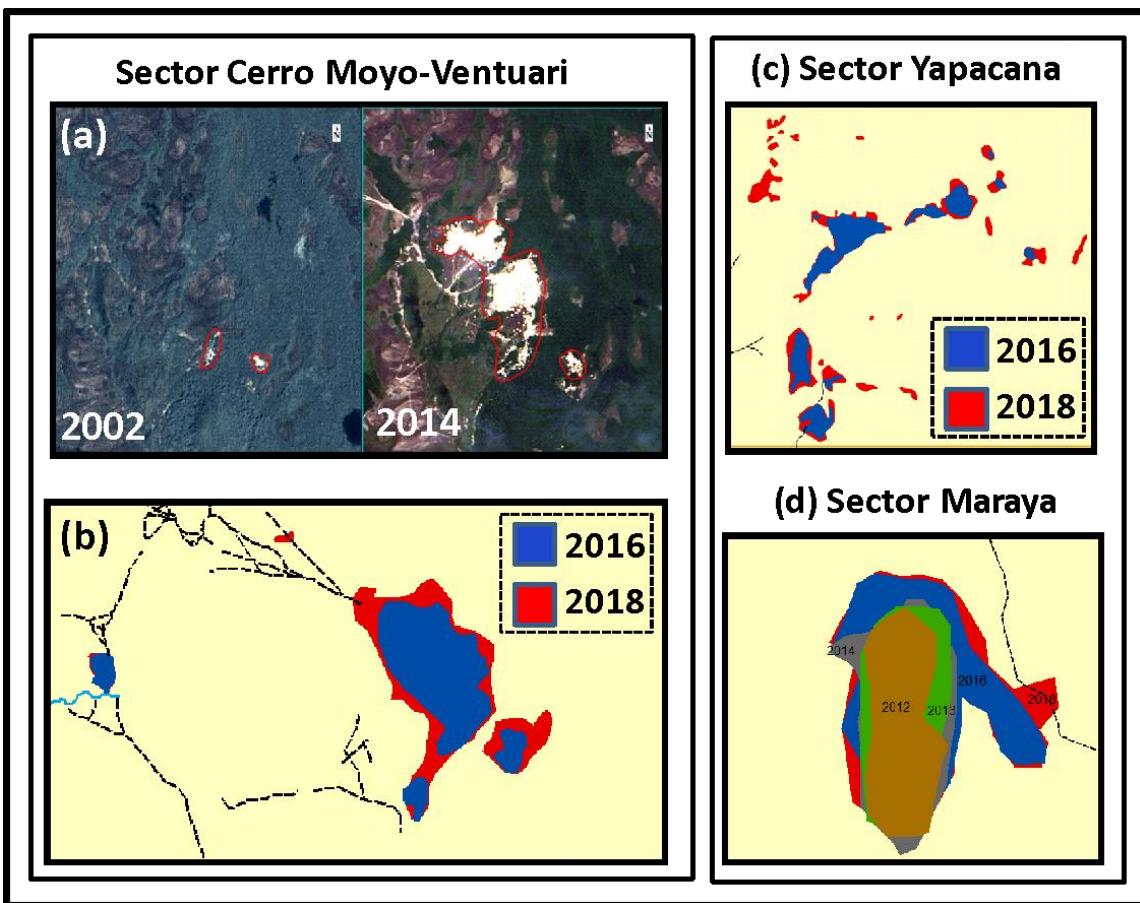


Figure C. Example of temporal analysis of mining activities in different sectors of YNP. (a) Increase in mining surface area during 2002-2014 (193.21 ha) detected in Landsat images; (b) Calculation of increase in mining surface area during 2016-2018 (245.18 ha); (c) Calculation of increase in mining surface area during 2016-2018 (429.86 ha); and (d) Calculation of increase in mining surface area during 2012-2013 (10.65 ha), 2013-2014 (15.11 ha), 2014-2016 (45.2 ha) and 2016-2018 (13.95 ha), utilizing QGIS application (b, c, and d).



Source: Prepared by the authors. The mining areas represented in this figure are of an illustrative nature (dimensionless)

3. Geographical location of mining activity

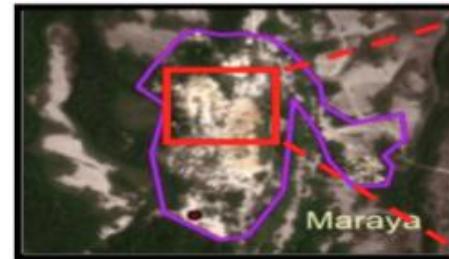
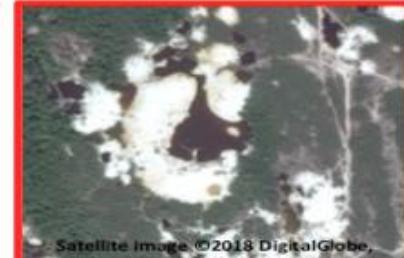
IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	SECTOR	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION (UTM Zone 19/WGS84)		SURFACE AREA AFFECTED (ha)	HIGH SPATIAL RESOLUTION IMAGE (Sentinel-2)	VERY HIGH SPATIAL RESOLUTION IMAGE (World View-2)
		X (West)	Y (North)			
1		730,981.62	430,431.20	426.46		
8		732,397.49	429,312.90	70.16		
11		726,703.62	441,046.92	42.31		
15		725,635.86	430,484.65	19.45		
21		727,638.23	425,904.06	8.39		
22		720,427.89	436,917.85	7.59		
25		727,351.29	426,614.47	6.06		
27		728,608.12	432,624.51	4.65		

34 **Moyo-Ventuari** 727,814.68 425,493.31 1.87



35 736,091.91 432,377.84 1.68

36 727,201.77 425,591.48 0.72

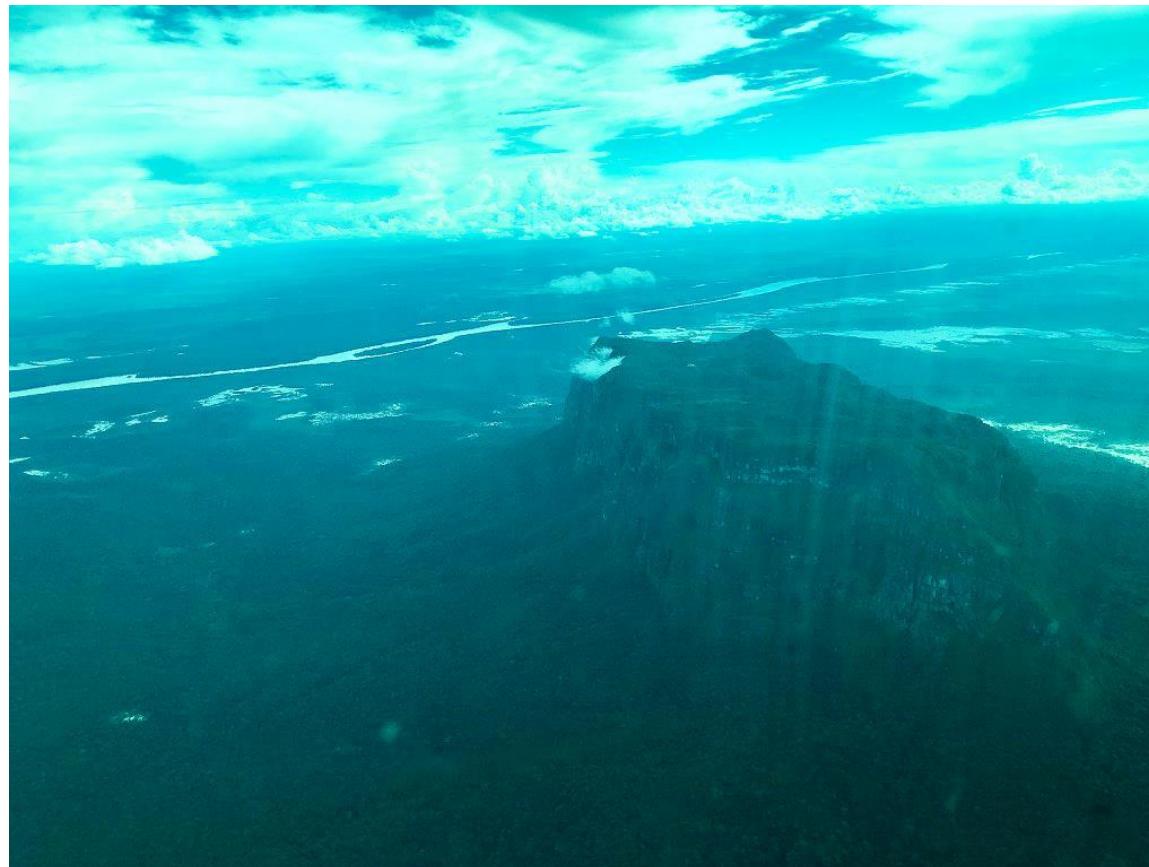
IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	SECTOR	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION (UTM Zone 19/WGS84)		SURFACE AREA AFFECTED (ha)	HIGH SPATIAL RESOLUTION IMAGE (Sentinel-2)	VERY HIGH SPATIAL RESOLUTION IMAGE (World View-2)
		X (West)	Y (North)			
5	Maraya	742,159.95	422,764.65	150.79	  <p>Satellite image ©2018 DigitalGlobe, a Maxar company.</p>	  <p>Satellite image ©2018 DigitalGlobe, a Maxar company.</p>

IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	SECTOR	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION (UTM Zone 19/WGS84)		SURFACE AREA AFFECTED (ha)	HIGH SPATIAL RESOLUTION IMAGE (Sentinel-2)	VERY HIGH SPATIAL RESOLUTION IMAGE (World View-2)
		X (West)	Y (North)			
2	Cerro Yapacana	743,269.18	410,170.05	376.13		
3		747,366.11	411,582.07	199.64		
4		741,673.47	405,582.07	199.14		
6		742,341.36	403,295.17	143.71		
7		740,322.84	412,196.59	84.10		
9		742,903.35	404,954.10	52.70		
10		750,642.19	409,625.73	48.61		
12		749,232.40	412,399.07	33.95		
13		748,871.63	413,559.46	21.76		
14		752,341.27	409,819.28	21.24		
16		744,201.27	404,606.01	17.92		
17		740,740.78	414,714.57	17.53		
18		748,903.69	410,747.42	15.52		
19		745,900.42	404,379.71	14.89		
20		740,670.09	413,814.93	8.59		
23		740,692.47	413,190.54	7.17		
24		741,520.23	414,145.14	6.32		
26		747,783.06	405,455.31	5.15		
28		743,982.27	414,129.65	4.54		
29		740,544.50	414,110.72	4.16		
30		742,499.94	405,533.07	3.80		
31		745,492.98	407,276.78	2.97		
32		744,429.25	407,243.73	2.66		
33		740,984.36	414,367.02	2.62		

4. Photographic Gallery

Cerro Yapacana. Orinoco River in the background: No mines on the mountaintop.

South-southeast slope of the mountain. Year 2017. Source: Confidential

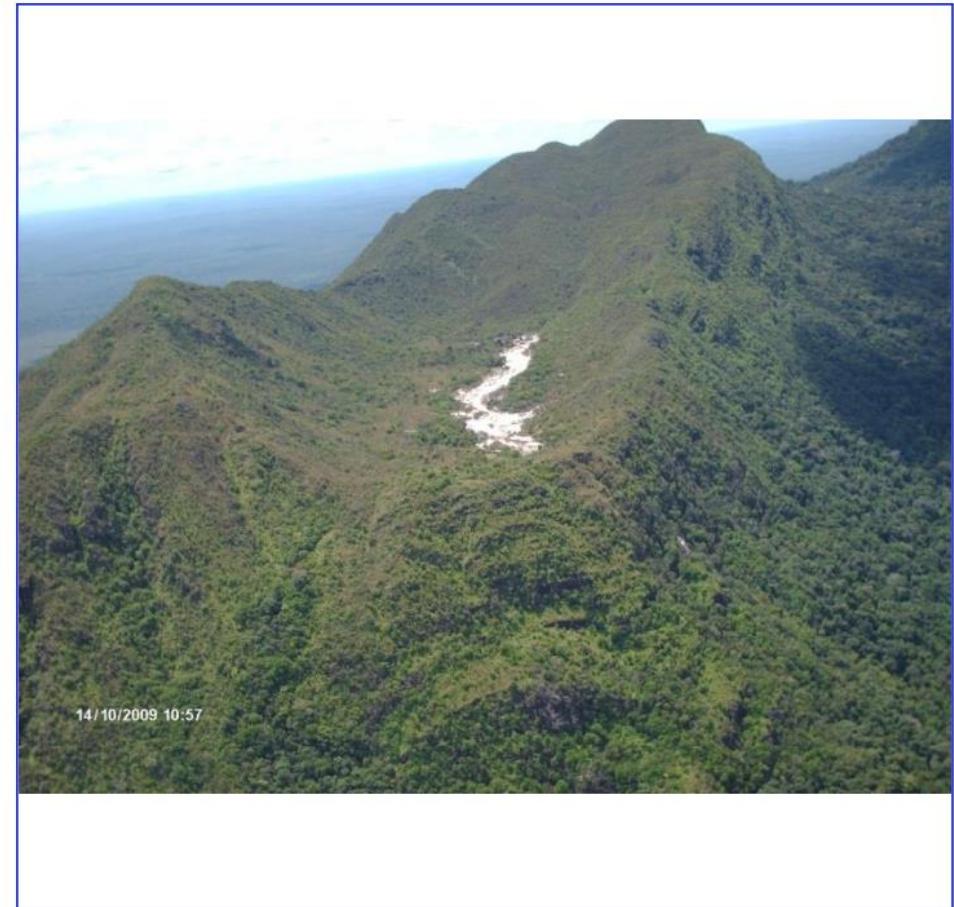


Top of Cerro Yapacana: La Cocina Mine

Year 2017. Source: Confidential



Year 2009. Source: GNB

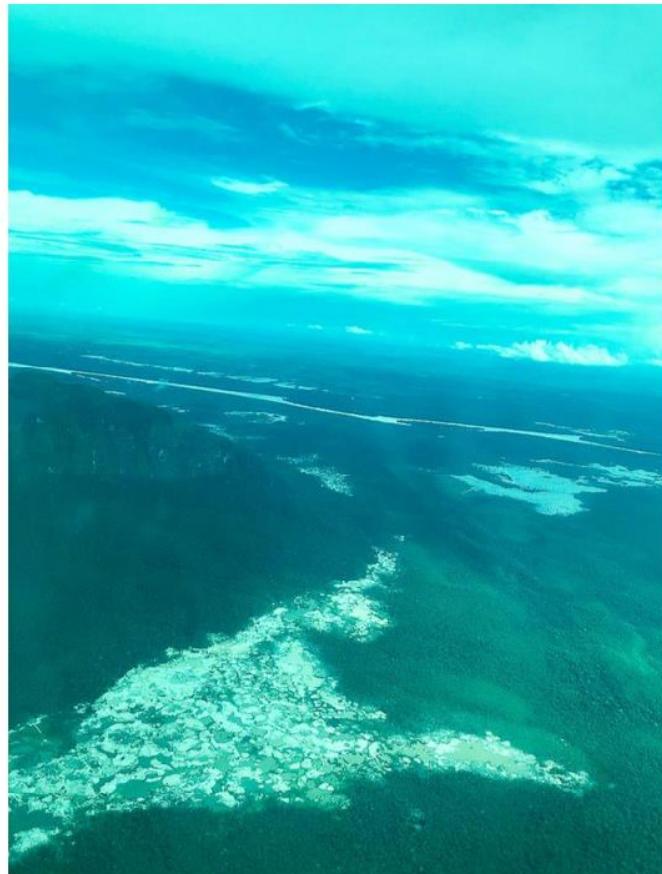


Cerro Moyo Mining Sector. Year 2017. Source: Confidential



Cerro Yapacana Sector - Northeast Slope

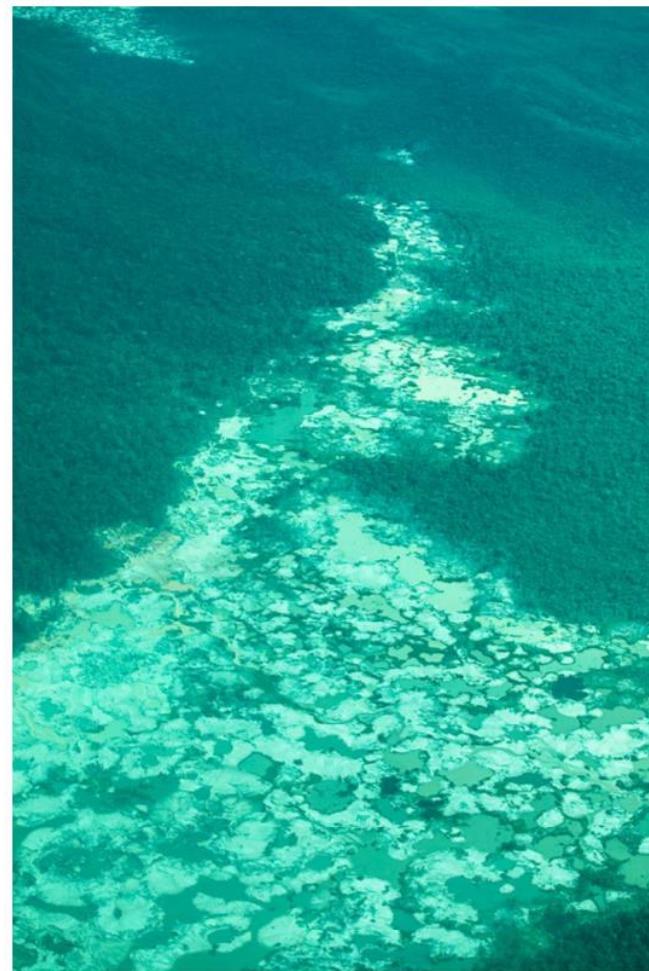
**Santa Rita, Cacique and Platanillal Mines.
Connected. Year 2017. Source: Confidential**



**Mina Grande (background). Mina Nueva (foreground).
Year 2009. Source: GNB**



**Santa Rita, Cacique and Platanillal Mines (connected).
Year 2017. Source: Confidential**



**Cerro Yapacana Mining Sector: Northeast and South Sides of the Mountain.
Year 2017. Source: Confidential**



**Cerro Yapacana Mining Sector. Northwest Side. Looking West.
Orinoco River in the Background. Year 2017. Source: Confidential**



Details of Mines in Foothills of Cerro Yapacana

Source: GNB circa 2006



Details of Mines in Foothills of Cerro Yapacana

Source: GNB circa 2006



Military Operation at a Mine in the Foothills of Cerro Yapacana

Destruction of Mining Camp Structures. Photo: 2017



Seized Materials. Photo: 2017



Cerro Yapacana Viewed from the Orinoco River.

Circa 2018. Source: ©ACL_SPV



Mining Panorama at Yapacana National Park Circa 2018. Source: ©ACL_SPV



Columns of Smoke at Mining Site. Reasons Unknown.

Circa 2018. Source: ©ACL_SPV



5. Guerrilla Forces

Using as a foundation the research titled "**Territorial background and dynamics of dissidents from the FARC**," conducted in Colombia by the Ideas for Peace Foundation (**FIP**), published in April of 2018, and comparing it with information obtained from our interviewed individuals, we have derived the following informative points that shed light on the situation posed by the guerrilla's territorial control at Yapacana.

- The "*Frente 1*," one of the most representative structures in the FARC, whose origins date back to 1965 when they were part of what was then the *Bloque Armado Sur* [Southern Armed Bloc], became structured, starting in the 1990's, in the form of organizational, financial, recruiting, political, intelligence and military commissions. In those years, in the 1990's, the *Frente* moves toward the border with Brazil, in the region of the Taraira, in the Colombian department of Vaupés, with the intention of extracting gold and consolidating border areas, something "*Frente 16*" had already accomplished along the border with Venezuela, along the Orinoco River, in the Colombian department of Guainía⁸³.
- Along the Guainía - Vichada - Arauca - Venezuelan Guayana geographical belt, a region that consists of the Colombian departments of Guainía, Vichada and Arauca (more specifically, the Upper Plains and the Orinoco Corridor), and in the Venezuelan states of Apure, Bolívar and Amazonas (the Llanos and Guayana regions), along the cross border area, the following has been identified:
 - Activity by dissident groups from the FARC consisting of former members of the *Frente 16* and the *Frente Acacio Medina*.
 - Movements by the ELN, starting in Arauca toward areas of the department of Vichada, as well as along the border, along the Orinoco River and toward Venezuelan towns located in the aforementioned states.
- Dissidents from the FARC in this region have been studied the least in Colombia. From the moment the *Frente 1* declared its dissidence, in mid 2016, people began to say that members of the *Frente 16* and the *Frente Acacio Medina* were not going to adhere to the peace process. These two *Frentes* have had an historical presence in Vichada, Guainía, and along the Colombia-Venezuela border (see Figure 5.2). Dissidence by these *Frentes* was confirmed in December of the same year, when the FARC removed from their ranks a series of leaders known by their aliases as "Gentil Duarte," "Euclides Mora," "Giovanny Chuspas," "John 40" and "Julián Chollo" (FARC-EP, 2016).⁸⁴
- In 2017, movements by experienced dissident leaders from the FARC "John 40," "Julián Chollo" and "Giovanny Chuspas," along with their respective groups, began to draw attention when their movements became evident in different areas

⁸³ FUNDACIÓN IDEAS PARA LA PAZ, 2018. *Trayectorias y dinámicas territoriales de las disidencias de las FARC* <http://viva.org.co/cajavirtual/svc0584/pdfs/FIP_Disidencias.pdf> Consulta del 12.12.18.

⁸⁴ FUNDACIÓN IDEAS PARA LA PAZ, 2018. Op. cit.

inside of Colombia, and from Colombia toward Venezuela, specifically in the department of Guainía going toward the Venezuelan state of Amazonas.

- Between 2016 and 2017 investigative journalism by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) produced reports that the ELN's mobilization toward the Colombian department of Vichada, and what they reported about Arauca and Guaviare, in 2017, "has led one to surmise that this movement has not been limited to Colombian territory. In interviews conducted in both Colombian departments, **evidence has been presented that the presence of the ELN in Venezuela is not new - especially in the states of Apure and Bolívar. But the fact remains that they are making themselves more visible at Puerto Páez, Puerto Ayacucho and San Fernando de Atabapo;** all three are Venezuelan towns in the state of Amazonas, on the Orinoco River. In this sense, there are two aspects that are noteworthy for this region: **the continued presence of dissidents from the FARC, and recent inroads by the ELN.**"⁸⁵

● The *Frente 16* and the *Frente Acacio Medina* continue to be present, with some changes, in areas where they had been mobilizing historically. Meanwhile, one would assume that the *Frente 16*, under the command of "Giovanny Chuspas," might be mobilizing toward border areas between the municipalities of La Primavera (in Vichada) and Cravo Norte (in Arauca), which has set off alarms in the region.

● The dissidents from the *Frente Acacio Medina*, led by "**Julián Chollo**" and "**John 40**," maintain their routes for mobilizing between Barranco Mina (in Guainía) and Cumaribo (in Vichada), toward the Orinoco River. Nevertheless, **they have fortified their presence in Venezuela along the Ventuari River**, trying to gain access to the margins of the Orinoco Mining Arc, starting in the state of Amazonas. To these groups, as we shall see later on, one may add the presence of **Edgar Mesías Salgado Aragón**, known as "**Rodrigo Cadete**".

● The geographical location of these two *Frentes*, up until the time of the peace talks in Havana, had been of strategic importance to the *Bloque Oriental* of the FARC, in terms of funding and military capabilities. These two structures, together with the *Frente 39*, settled into a region that connected the Upper Plains to Colombia's borders with Venezuela and Brazil, by way of the Colombian departments of Vichada and Guainía. The creation of these *Frentes* was achieved in a progressive manner, the ***Frente 16*** being the oldest, given that it began in **1983** as part of the deployment of *Frentes 1, 7 and 10 for purposes of obtaining funds* - by being able to regulate and control the purchase and sale of **coca** paste and cocaine - **and to establish international contacts for securing the exportation of drugs and the importation of weapons.** It is known that this structure received special attention from "Mono Jojoy," given that the profits derived from the drug trafficking secured for him one of the most important sources of funding for the entire organization.

⁸⁵ Op Cit. Text highlighted by our authors.

- The *Frente Acacio Medina* tells a different story. Even though, at the beginning, this *Frente* presented itself as part of the implementation of policy toward the border areas, and of **the need to increase the presence of guerrilla forces in the neighboring countries in order to provide guarantees for the trafficking of weapons and drugs**, according to what was established in the Eighth Conference of 1993, the real consolidation of this *Frente* became reality between the years **2007 and 2009**. It was part of a strategy of containment and retreat: containment in the event of the failure of *Plan Renacer* [Rebirth Plan], launched in 2009, and retreat as **a safety measure for the more experienced senior members of the FARC as well as for guerrilla fighters who were in no physical condition to fight, and required medical attention in Venezuela**. It is worth remembering that **in 2009 this region had the highest concentration of coca fields**, remotely accessible by foot trails, thus the FARC's reinforcement and subsequent consolidation in this area became essential for keeping the war economy afloat.
- Keeping in mind these historical factors, dissidence among these *Frentes* is no minor problem, despite the fact that, according to the statistics from the first section, they have not demonstrated comparable armed capabilities. The main risk is that **they may consolidate the waterways that connect the Colombian departments of Meta and Guaviare with the Upper Plains and the international border**. To this one must add the humanitarian impact this will have on the indigenous reservation in the departments of Meta, Vichada and Guainía, plus the risks presented by the **recruitment and use of underage individuals on both sides of the border**.
- The presence of dissidents led by "Gentil Duarte" and "Iván Mordisco," who have placed themselves at the most important coca production center in eastern Colombia (in the southern part of Meta and Guaviare), would lead one to infer that the dissidents from the *Frente 16* and the *Frente Acacio Medina* continue to fulfill the role of a pivot, or kingpin, for keeping alive the different segments of the criminal economies and corridors that were once controlled by the *Bloque Oriental*. Even though the structure led by "Iván Mordisco" is of geographical interest in that it includes the course of the Guaviare River, it appears to be focused more on the Miraflores-Barranquillita-Vaupés-Brazil corridor. In any case, the center of activity in the department of Guaviare has multiple outlets or corridors for drug trafficking, for which **the Inírida River, which flows thorough the departments of Guaviare and Guainía and empties into the Orinoco River, becomes a matter of interest for the dissidents from the *Frente Acacio Medina***.⁸⁶
- Variables such as the kinds of leadership in the *Frente 16* and the *Frente Acacio Medina*, the preexisting social networks that have been kept alive, the regions thorough which they mobilize, and the new criminal opportunities, allow one to assume that these groups will continue to evolve in this bi-national region, all of which requires strategies for combatting and dismantling these groups **in a**

⁸⁶ Óp. cit. P. 94 – 96.

coordinated effort with neighboring countries, something that is null in the case of Venezuela today. All of these variables point to a situation of criminal apprenticeship, and lend clues as to the sustainability of these groups and the violent paths that they may follow.

- The continued presence of **Ernesto Orjuela** ("Giovanny Chuspas") with dissident units from the *Frente 16*, as well as that of **Gener García Molina** ("John 40") and **Miguel Díaz** ("Julián Chollo") with dissents from the *Acacio Medina Frente*, cannot be underestimated. In the case of the group first mentioned, the leadership of "Giovanny Chuspas" marks some continuity. In 2013 he became first in command. According to consulted sources, he entered the FARC in the late 1980's, and has received military and leadership training. He enjoys legitimacy among those who did not partake in the peace talks and has the ability, added onto his seniority and experience, to coordinate actions along with "John 40" and "Julián Chollo." Due to the embryonic relationship that the *Frente 16* once had with *Frentes 1* and *7*, it is very probable that he has connections of sorts with "Gentil Duarte" and "Iván Mordisco." **The reasons why they have become dissidents** are not well known, but **one must not disregard** external factors such as **the criminal economies and the demand for cocaine and precious metals along the border between Colombia and Venezuela.**

- There is no clear understanding with respect to how many members belong to this dissent group, but we do know that at the beginning of the peace talks in Havana, **in the year 2012, the Frente 16 had between 80 and 100 combatants.** But one must not discard the possibility that they are being reinforced by collaborative efforts with dissident groups from the *Frente 1*, the *Frente 7*, the *Frente Acacio Medina*, and possibly with the ELN. **There is also concern about possible recruitment activity** by this group - which would give it a larger foothold - given their proximity to the indigenous population and territories in the southeastern part of Meta, Vichada and Guainía, as **the Frente 16 has characterized itself for having developed political and organizational work with these communities.** Currently, there is no certainty as to whether this still holds true, or whether there may now be variations and a more predatory behavior. In any case, an important point of reference is the impact suffered by the indigenous communities of Guacamayas, El Zancudo and Caño Mosquito, in Guainía, as a result of recruitment by the *Frente 16* in the past.

- "Giovanny Chuspas" is said to have kept his social networks alive, that is to say, his contacts along the Colombia-Venezuela border, his relations with members of the *Frente Acacio Medina*, the use of waterways as a conduit for transit between Vichada and Guainía toward the Orinoco River, as well as **a criminal scheme for managing the profits derived from the drug trafficking and the illegal extraction of gold and coltan.**

- "John 40" and "Julián Chollo," who until 2013 had been acting in their respective capacities as Commander and Fourth Relief Commander of the *Frente Acacio Medina*, also separated from the FARC in 2016. Currently, it is not clear how many members might be in this dissent group. Calculations by intelligence sources

state that the *Frente Acacio Medina* had no more than 60 members before the peace talks began in 2012. Nonetheless, it is very difficult to render an accurate count because of the high number of Venezuelans who had joined this group, but had stayed in their own country without being enrolled at the time of the surrender of weapons and the demobilization. The leadership of these two former members of the FARC suggests, as in the case of the *Frente 16*, the presence of some elements of continuity that are important for understanding what the dissidents are doing today. Both commanders occupied command positions in the FARC: "John 40" was a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the *Bloque Oriental*, while "Chollo" was Fourth Relief Commander of the *Frente Acacio Medina*. **The two consolidated a war economy based on drug trafficking, controlling the purchase and sale of minerals, and establishing contact with transnational organized crime networks in Brazil and Venezuela.**

- "John 40" was sent to the border area between the Colombian department of Guainía and Venezuela in 2008 in order to receive medical attention. Notwithstanding, he received orders from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to organize a new structure meant to protect experienced senior leaders who were already in Venezuela, and to establish or renew international contacts that had been established by Tomás Medina Caracas, alias "Negro Acacio," killed in 2007.
- **"Julián Chollo" was more involved in illegal mining activity in Colombia and Venezuela, and became increasingly involved in controlling tungsten, coltan and gold mines.** It is common knowledge, for example, that "Chollo" took over a gold mine in the Caño Manapiaré area, in the municipality of Puerto Inírida (department of Guainía, Colombia). Consequently, recent news should come as no surprise, such as the case of the dismantling of an illegal mine called "El Cejal," in Inírida (department of Guainía), and of the capture of two members of the *Frente Acacio Medina* (at El Morichal, 2018). Up until 2013, "John 40" was in charge of finances for the *Bloque Oriental*, which guaranteed for him a certain degree of independence from the rest of the FARC, and a progressive criminal **"degradation."**
- It is also known that both guerrilla leaders control the **clandestine landing strips** along the Guainía River, where it borders on Venezuela and Brazil, and at river towns along the Atabapo and the Río Negro. At these landing strips they collect between 30 and 50 million Colombian pesos from the drug traffickers for the departure of **every flight loaded with cocaine.**
- The aforementioned matter has not been stopped; on the contrary, it has intensified. **The most visible face of the dissidents for the *Frente Acacio Medina* is that of "Julián Chollo," yet little is known about "John 40," and it is believed that he may have taken refuge in Venezuela, protected by that country's government forces in exchange for bribes, while he resorts to making threats against the general population.** Thus, with "Julián Chollo" in the lead, and with an indeterminate number of Colombians and Venezuelans, this dissident group has taken control of the gold deposits in Yapacana National Park, where it is suspected that "John 40" is positioned. As can be seen in Figure 5.2,

this group has been entering by way of the border crossing at San Fernando de Atabapo, then going to Yapacana National Park and beyond, and up the Ventuari River as far as the San Juan de Manapiare region, which connects with the Serranía Guanay, a mountain ridge along the border of the states of Amazonas and Bolívar (Segovia, 2018).

- In this part of Venezuela, in addition to the important mining activity, **there is collaboration with the Venezuelan authorities**, which have turned a blind eye to the denunciations from the indigenous people concerning the risks of forced recruitment. There is also increased evidence that **the trajectory followed by this dissident group has led them to position themselves along the margins of Area 1 of the Orinoco Mining Arc (AMO)**, where there are coltan, diamond and gold deposits (see Figure 5.2). As can be read below, **the similar positioning of the ELN in the north, along the fringes of the AMO, would indicate that there is some kind of collaboration between the two groups.**

- People familiar with this region of Venezuela warn that the arrival of both groups, reaching as far as the Mining Arc, may generate confrontations with local armed groups, known as "syndicates," who guard the ore deposits and have the support of the Venezuelan government. The behavior of these "syndicates" is mafia-like: they control all activity surrounding the mines (food delivery, prostitution, dredging equipment, miners' organizations), and they have even been accused of enslaving people who arrive in search of jobs from different parts of Venezuela, as well as from Colombia, Brazil and Guyana. They possess long weapons, and consequently, there is fear about what might happen, given the presence of the ELN and the dissident groups from the FARC. The tendency is for these dissident groups to aggravate the process of internal degradation and criminalization that they were already experiencing when they were still a part of the *Bloque Oriental*. While there may exist "organizational and political motives" for entering into dissident groups, in this case, **the scales tip toward economical reasons and preexisting opportunities offered by the criminal economies in this regional complex, where the international borders fail to serve as barriers to keep these groups from prospering.**

- These two dissident groups will be of strategic importance for the **consolidation of a large region that will allow the dissident groups from the Colombian departments of Meta, Guaviare and Caquetá to secure a war economy that is dependent, to a large extend, on demand from international sectors along the borders with Venezuela and Brazil.** In other words, in the image and resemblance of the operation that was once the FARC's *Bloque Oriental* that articulated these same areas by means of pivotal structures.

- **The ELN's recent trajectories:** One of the current characteristics of the belt that runs from Colombia's Orinoco region to Venezuela's Guayana region is the ELN's territorial expansion, which appears to be taking hold along two avenues: the first goes toward areas where they have not been before historically, such as the municipality of Cumaribo (Colombian department of Vichada); and the second consists of **expanding their influence in Venezuela, starting out from their**

historical operational centers in the state of Apure and going toward the state of Amazonas, between Puerto Páez, Puerto Ayacucho and San Fernando de Atabapo, which are towns on the Orinoco River.

- With the deactivation of almost all of the FARC in the Colombian department of Arauca (whose *Frentes* were demobilized at strategic sites), the ELN, by way of its *Frente Rafael Blanco*, a part of the *Frente de Guerra Oriental*, began a process of expansion in 2016 toward the municipality of Cumaribo, in the Colombian department of Vichada. According to several sources, this process was first initiated by people dressed as civilians starting at Puerto Carreño along the Orinoco River and going as far as Cumaribo. These individuals established regulations governing smuggling activities and drug trafficking, and held periodic meeting with members of the communities.
- According to fieldwork done by the International Federation Journalists (IFJ), the process of reinforcement at Cumaribo was supported by the units that are positioned in Arauca. During the bilateral ceasefire, a process of reorganizing the ELN in the zone got underway, which allowed the commanders and combatants in Arauca to go down to the department of Vichada. This movement resembled a two-way street, since people from Vichada, who had originally come from Venezuela, now went up to Arauca. According to the sources, commanders from Vichada had arrived at this area in order to reorganize its structure and its territorial presence, and at the same time send men to Cumaribo in order to consolidate their presence.
- A report states that starting in late 2017 the ELN began to show its presence in the Guaviare River basin; along the footpaths and jungle areas of Puerto Príncipe, Güerima, Santa Rita and Chupave; and along the border with Venezuela at Puerto Nariño and Amanaven (municipality of Cumaribo) and Chaparral (Puerto Carreño). (Starting in 2016, there have been reports of actions by the ELN directed against Colombian Government Forces at Cumaribo).
- There are **conflicting reports about the movements by the ELN toward the Guaviare River basin**. Interviews with officials from intelligence agencies and people who have been through the area lead one to believe that this has nothing to do with a real presence of the ELN, but rather with the use of ELN emblematic armbands by dissidents from the FARC, who intend to confuse the populace. The incursion by these groups was reportedly taking place in order to provide security for "Rodrigo Cadete," another experienced senior, and a dissident from the FARC, who retired from the endeavor in September of last year to the rural area of El Paujil (Caquetá) - his place of birth. Nonetheless, he may well be securing the region southeast of Puerto Gaitán (Meta), the Guaviare River basin, and the bi-national border along the Orinoco River, in an effort to restructure the sphere of influence formerly held by the *Frente 39*, of which he was once the commander between 2007 and 2017. The other report says that the ELN has a presence in the jungle territories of the department of Guainía, from the rapids of the Mapiripana River to the waters of the Orinoco. The rapid expansion of the ELN in the area may be associated with **possible alliances between the FARC dissidents and the *Frente Rafael Blanco*, the substitution of the emblematic**

armbands, or the collaboration between former members of the FARC and the ELN.

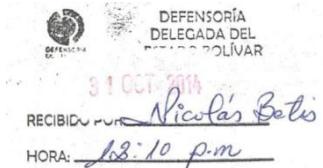
- The ELN's influence has also intensified in Venezuela, starting from its historic centers in the state of Apure and shifting toward the state of Amazonas, between Puerto Páez, Puerto Ayacucho and San Fernando de Atabapo. At these towns, which are located on the Orinoco River, starting in 2013 there have been reports of very low profile movement by the ELN originating in the state of Apure, where they have camps that they began to establish many years ago, and where the more important heads of the region's armed organizations are positioned. Venezuelan journalist María Antonia Segovia reports that in 2016 the ELN consolidated its expansion and positioned itself at Puerto Ayacucho, thus initiating its process of reinforcing their presence along this border (see Segovia, 2018).
- While their presence is not sustained in the heart of Puerto Ayacucho, **the ELN's objective in this area is to control the passage of gasoline, food and diesel fuel (used by riverboats) across the borders.** Nonetheless, this control is not limited to the border areas, as eyewitnesses state that **the ELN also controls vessels that go into Venezuelan territory by way of the Cuao, Autana, Sipapo and Guayapo rivers.** This kind of control also suggests that the ELN has intentions of collecting a tax on the passage of cocaine, which is transported along various routes from Colombia going from west to east. **In this respect, the tributaries that flow into the Orinoco from the Colombian department of Vichada play an essential role.**
- In August of 2017 there was a meeting in Amanaven, a Colombian town located in the municipality of Cumaribo (Vichada) and a few kilometers to the north of where the Guaviare River empties into the Orinoco. There, a place from which one can see San Fernando de Atabapo (Venezuela) in the distance, the ELN summoned the residents, took roll and advised them that they had arrived to establish order and prohibit "vice and robberies" and to "resolve community problems." The residents stated that the armed men were not known to them and were wearing armbands that are emblematic of this guerrilla group.
- These events still leave unanswered questions about the presumed autonomy of the ELN for mobilizing throughout the region, and whether this has to do with the emblematic armbands worn by men loyal to "Cadete," as has already been explained, or of an as of yet undetermined leadership component. Should this be so, we may be confronted by **a scenario of coordination between different FARC dissidents (including those loyal to "Cadete" and "Julián Chollo" of the Frente Acacio Medina), but also by the ELN leadership in coordination with these groups,** which is facilitated by the failed condition of the territory's institutions, characterized by the **limited presence of Colombia's Government Forces and by the collaborative ties that exist between the Venezuelan authorities, the FARC dissidents and the ELN.**
- **The ELN continues with its process of expansion, ultimately establishing itself at the Venezuelan town of San Fernando de Atabapo,** where the Guaviare River empties into the Orinoco. This area, which has served as a

conduit for drug and weapons trafficking, guarantees mobility as it connects the bi-national border with the interior of both countries. Thus **the ELN is able to position itself in a large part of the border area, and control any movement along the waterways toward the interior of Venezuela, mainly by having mobility along the Autana, Cuao, Sipapo and Guayapo rivers** (see Figure 5.2). According to Segovia's research, in the municipality of Atabapo, the ELN set up a camp in the Cayo Viejita sector, by the highway going to Santa Bárbara de Orinoco, and since early 2017 it has been convening meetings with the members of the communities for the purpose of establishing its own standards of social and territorial control.

- The ELN's interest in establishing itself in this area is mainly economical. In addition to general smuggling and cocaine trafficking there is also the possibility of gaining control over the illegal mining activity on the shores of the Sipapo River, in addition to the profits derived from the drug trafficking. Likewise, according to Segovia, the ELN was able to establish itself along a shortcut that connects the municipality of Manapiare, in the state of Amazonas, to the state of Bolívar, going by way of Los Pijiguaos, the Upper Parguaza, and finally at a spot called the "Y," an intersection between Puerto Nuevo and the highway to Caicara, where there is an illegal open pit operation extracting coltan, which is located in a section of Area 1 of the Mining Arc.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ SEGOVIA, M. A. 2018. La disidencia de la guerrilla colombiana penetra el Amazonas venezolano. ArmandoInfo.<<https://armando.info/Reportajes/DemoPublico/2393>> Accessed on 12 Dec 18.

6. Official Record and Report from San José de Kayamá



San José de Kayamá, 19 October 2014

Official Record and Report concerning the presence of guerrilla forces on Eñepa and Jodí indigenous land in the Sierra de Maigualida of the State of Bolívar, Venezuela

On 19 October of the current year a meeting convened by the chiefs, leaders, teachers, council members, and committees of the Eñepa and Jodí ethnic communities of San José de Kayamá, in the ancestral territories belonging to our peoples, located in the Sierra Maigualida of the State of Bolívar.

The purpose was to gather together to address the problem of the presence of guerrilla forces on our territory, whom we recognized at first sight as being outsiders and who did not have our permission to enter.

When our chiefs and leaders from both communities spoke to all of us to have us recall and analyze every one of the moments and how we felt when we found these guerrilla soldiers on our territory. Our two communities agree that we feel invaded, are concerned and are afraid to go out into the wilderness to go about our daily tasks when we have strangers on our territory, and for this reason we agreed to prepare an official record and report about what has happened, so that the appropriate authorities may take measures pertaining to the case

All persons who had encountered the guerrilla soldiers were invited to describe each of the moments they had experienced, which they related in the following manner:

On 02 October of the present year, while we, who belong to the Eñepa indigenous group, were going about our daily activities of fishing and other things, while at a distance of 12 hours away from the residential center of the Eñepa and Jodí communities in the Ma'tura sector, at approximately 8 am, four people arrived at the place where we were: three men and one woman, all armed, with firearms, actually rifles, and one of them had a pistol. With them was a big black dog they called Jet-Black.

The four individuals were wearing trousers and T-shirts, black and dark green in color, and tall rubber boots, black in color, and large hiking packs on their backs. Two of the individuals had bandanas tied around their heads.

Two of the guerrilla soldiers approached the house where we were and greeted us. One of us made a hand gesture suggesting they lay their weapons down on the ground, which they did, but one of them held on to his own weapon. They asked us if there were more people besides those present at the moment. We told them there were other members of our group, and we called for them right away. They asked us what we were doing. We told them, in the Eñepa language, that we were making curare, but they did not understand us.

In the Eñepa language, we asked them: "Who are you? What are you looking for? Might you be guerrillas?" They nodded their heads only when they heard the word "guerrillas," but they did not understand the rest. The conversation was short because of the language limitations, even though we were able to understand. However, those of us who were there were unable to say much in Spanish.

Even though they did not understand our language, we understood theirs. They told us they were guerrilla fighters and had not come to do us harm. They only wanted to know if there were any miners or other strangers. One of the guerrillas said, "We're friends of President Nicolás Maduro."

After that short conversation, three of the Eñepa group accompanied them on foot for about 15 minutes. During that walk they called their chief over the radio using the HB frequency and told him that they were with the Eñepa people and were moving on toward Jodí territory, guiding themselves with the GPS and a compass they carried.

On Sunday the 5th of that same month, at 8 am they went through the land belonging to the Jodí people in the sector called Jkwíwi Jtaune, where the family of Mr. Tomás Uriña, of the Jodí ethnic group lives. They went by Mr. Agustín Jodí's house. There were children near there who, out of fear, were screaming, "*Criollos, criollos!*" And we went out to see who they were and we asked them, "Who are you? Where do you come from? Where are you going?" To which they answered, "We've come from the Cuchivero River and are going to Boca de Nichare on the Caura River. We asked them if they wanted to eat something and they said no. We asked them, "Why aren't you going as far as the mission?" They replied, "We can't go beyond the line indicated by the compass." And they went on their way.

That same day, the family notified the chiefs of the community that there were *criollos* here on our land, and the community organized right away in order to verify.

On Monday the 6th we, one of the Jodí groups, left very early before dawn and we came upon these very same four individuals in the Ojtawijkajka sector, where the family of Mr. Mario Liye lives. They were wearing raingear, were armed, and had two compasses hanging down to their chest, a small battery operated communications radio, two GPS's, and some large hiking packs on their backs, and they were still accompanied by the big black dog, which had been mentioned.

One man from the indigenous group, who came out to meet them, asked them, "What are you looking for?" They replied, "Nothing. We're going to Boca de Nichare on the Caura River, looking for others belonging to our groups that are on the Caura River. There are others to the north, to the south, to the east and to the west." We asked, "Might you be looking for gold?" They said, "No, we don't want to take anything from this land. We're here to defend you from other groups." We asked them, "Where are your documents, your national ID card?" They said, "We don't have any." We asked them, "Who sent you?" They said, "Maduro. We come on orders from the president." We asked them, "Where is the permit?" They said, "Our chief in Colombia has it. The president contacted our chief and asked him to come to see if there were other groups such as paramilitaries or miners." We asked, "What country are you from?" They said, "We're guerrilla soldiers from Colombia." We said, "You mustn't persist in being here. Something might happen to you." The guerrilla soldier asked them, "Why? What are you going to do about it?" The answer was, "We're

not going to do anything, but those places are sacred and dangerous, be careful." Another indigenous man said, "Go away and don't come back along that road."

On Saturday the 11th of that same month they were seen again in the Jkwiwi Jtaune sector, belonging to the Jodí, the same four guerrilla soldiers and the black dog. They were moving along quickly, without stopping, as if they were scared. A young man from the area came to notify the chief of the Jodí community telling him that the *criollos* had come through again, and they went back to see what they wanted. We, the Jodí, notified the Eñepa, who also organized in order to go after the guerrilla group.

We crossed paths them on the same road they had used on the way into the Eñepa sector. Upon meeting them, the two villages invited them to stay here in the community so that they could have a talk with the chiefs of the Eñepa and Jodí communities and explain to them the reason for their presence on our lands. That was agreed upon and they went to the Eñepa community, to the house of one of the indigenous individuals.

While at the *churuata*, which is the traditional Eñepa house, the Eñepa chief said to them, "There is no permission to enter here without authorization from this community. If you have it, please show it!" They replied, "We have no documents because we're rovers and documents aren't necessary in the jungle." We asked, "What do you have in your hiking packs? Marihuana? Coca? Or bombs?" They replied, "No, no we don't have anything. We only carry weapons. You may check the hiking packs."

Then one of us said, "Please, everyone open your hiking packs, and we checked them and found rice, hard candy, medicine, snakebite serum, clothing, raingear, lanterns, batteries, hammocks, soap, brushes, bullet cartridges, the communications radio, the GPS's, compasses, razors and four pans.

"Now you can take it easy. Let's go over to my house. If anyone is sick we will take care of them," said one of the indigenous individuals." One of the guerrilla soldiers asked, "Can't we stay out here in the wilderness." "No," we replied. "Let's go over to my house." And we gave them manioc root, *coroba* and spicy food. They cooked, ate and lay down to sleep.

On the 12th of that same month, at approximately 8:30 am, they went, guided by individuals from the Eñepa group, over to the Eñepa students' dining hall at the mission. Immediately, we, the Jodí and Eñepa community, gathered together in order to enter into dialogue with three of the guerrilla soldiers, because one of them had stayed behind at the house of one of the indigenous folk because he was having a very serious medical problem with one of his legs.

After inviting them to be seated, we, the members of the two ethnic groups, initiated the dialogue with the speech by the Jodí chief, and he asked them, "Why did you enter here, into our territory without permission, without authorization from our authorities? Who are you? Where do you come from? What are you doing around here?" To which one of them replied, "We have authorization from our chief, who is in Colombia. We're from Colombia, guerrilla soldiers of the FARC. And it was through him that President Maduro established contact, and our chief sent us here to find out if there were any miners on these lands, as well as other groups, and to look after you and safeguard your territory." We asked them, "Where are your documents?" They replied, "Look here, *compañeros*, we have no national ID cards, because when we join the guerrilla forces they take away our documents. Others

don't have any because they join the guerrilla force before they're 18 and they aren't given national ID cards. Here it's different."

"We aren't people that want to invade this territory. We're here to defend you, because we come here authorized by Maduro's government. Another indigenous man asked, "How do you keep in contact with your chief?" The reply from the same guerrilla soldier was, "Through the radio he knows where we are, and by way of the coordinates he knows we're here and alive. You shouldn't be doing this to us because we're already authorized by our chief and are respectful of your chiefs and the community. You also have to respect us. That is why, *compañeros*, we ask you to let us go, so we can be on our way."

Another indigenous man asked him, "Are there other groups near here?" The reply was, "Not around here, but further downstream on the Guaniamo River there are other groups that walk around in the jungle like we do."

"Surrender your weapons to our chiefs voluntarily," said one of the indigenous. "The reply was, "No, *compañeros*, you can't do that to us. That would be humiliation. You have your weapons and we have ours. We are doing you no harm. That's why we've stored our weapons at the home of *compañero* Agustín." He kept insisting, "Let us go."

At 9:40 am a light aircraft belonging to military personnel from Group No. 9 landed at the community's landing strip. We were able to surmise that these military already knew what was happening here in Kayamá. They came asking about the emergency for which they had been called concerning a sick child. Three of the military went up to the community and arrived at the place where the guerrilla soldiers were meeting with the two communities. One of the military asked the guerrilla fighters, "Is this your entire group?" One of the guerrilla soldiers replied, "No, there is one that's sick, and he's across the river." The military officer replied, "Let's go visit him!" And he left, accompanied by a group from the Jodí and Eñepa communities.

Several of us, members of the indigenous communities, said to the guerrilla fighters, "You may not come by here to our territory without permission from our chiefs. If you come back, we're going to capture you again!"

All of us, the military officers, a group from the Eñepa and Jodí communities, and the guerrilla fighters went to the house of the indigenous man where the sick guerrilla fighter was, and he was ordered to pick up his hiking pack and his weapons. And they transferred the guerrilla fighter with the medical problem in his leg. After some dialogue between the military officers and the chiefs of the community, we asked the commander of the military group if they had any problems with the guerrilla soldiers to which the commander replied, "Don't worry, we know them and they're our friends, and they're also Bolivarian revolutionaries. We're always in contact with their chief."

At first they were only going to take the sick guerrilla soldier, but later they came to an agreement and decided to take the four guerrilla soldiers to Bolívar. And that is how this case ended, here in our community.

After the two communities pondered over this event for several days, we drew the following conclusions:

- At every instance, the guerrilla soldiers kept saying the same thing: "We are Colombian guerrilla soldiers. We were sent by President Maduro, by way of our chief in order to protect you from other groups. We're not here to harm you."
- They were also respectful and we acted likewise.

But some doubts have also emerged, such as:

1. Why is that the people that come to safeguard our territory have to be from another country?
2. Given that our indigenous authorities are considered legitimate by Article 19 of the Constitution and by Article 1, Section 8 and Articles 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the Organic Law on Indigenous Peoples and Communities (LOPCI), which reaffirm the need to consult the peoples and communities concerning any activity that may affect them directly or indirectly, why is it that our chiefs and communities were not informed and consulted?

We do not want these situations to repeat themselves. We also want to make it clear to our compatriots, Venezuelan or otherwise, that this ancestral land is our home, our life, our culture, which is why we love it and we have always taken care of it, and we, the Eñepa and Jodí peoples, are ready to defend it even with our own lives.

We, the Eñepa and Jodí peoples, are the original inhabitants of this land. We are autochthonous. Help us to take care of it and to defend it. We are also Venezuela.

Legitimate authorities of the Eñepa people of San José de Kayamá

Javier S.

Javier Sawin

13.945.033

Willian

Willian Puruwana

C.I 13.944.974

Ernesto P.

Ernesto Puruwana

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Pablo Chonoco

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Cruz

Cruz molo

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Gustavo I.

Gustavo Ijte

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Ismael
ISMAEL CIYE
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Anexos

Tito Jono

Tito Jono

All these photographs were taken at the moment the guerrilla soldiers were taken to the mission to have them explain to the Eñepa and Jodí communities the reasons for their presence in our territory.

